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FLORA·MASSON

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CHARLES LAMB

By FLORA MASSON

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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CALIFORNIA

CHARLES LAMB

CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY IN CROWN OFFICE ROW

In 1775, Mr. Samuel Salt, a middle-aged barrister—afterwards a bencher of the Inner Temple—was living in London, in chambers in Crown Office Row, a row of buildings facing the Temple Gardens and the river.

Mr. Salt was living in considerable comfort and dignity. It was a double set of chambers, a "substantial house," in fact; and Mr. Salt "kept his carriage" and two indoor servants, besides a trusted clerk and factotum, John Lamb, a married man, who had been in his service for many years. Mrs. Lamb acted as Mr. Salt's housekeeper; and the couple, with their family of children and a sister of John Lamb's, who had made her home with them, must have fully occupied the ground-floor rooms of Mr. Salt's establishment.

There could have been no stipulations about "encumbrances": the baptisms of seven little Lambs are to be found in the registers of the Temple Church, though, of the seven, Mr. and Mrs. Lamb succeeded in rearing only three—John, Mary Anne, and Charles. John, the eldest, was twelve, and Mary ten, years old, when Charles Lamb, the youngest of the family, "a weakly but very pretty babe," was born in the house in Crown Office Row—in one of the back, ground-floor rooms which looked into Inner Temple Lane—Feb. 10, 1775.

Not much is known about Charles Lamb's parents

before the days when they were living in Crown Office Row as clerk and housekeeper to Mr. Samuel Salt. Charles Lamb's father, John Lamb, was a Lincolnshire boy, who had come up to London at the age of fifteen to make his start in life in the smart new livery of a gentleman's servant. He had pushed his way up in the world to be confidential servant and barrister's clerk, and had married, rather late in life, Elizabeth Field, a woman a good deal younger than himself. She was a native of Ware, in Hertfordshire, and the daughter of a certain dignified Mrs. Field, who was for more than fifty years housekeeper to the Plumer family, at their fine old mansion of Blakesware, near to the village of Widford. Mrs. Lamb was a tall, handsome woman; placid, somewhat prosaic and matter-of-fact, and gentle-mannered beyond her station. So tall and handsome was she that their London friends used to say she "might be taken for a sister of Mrs. Siddons"; whereas her husband, John Lamb, was a little fellow—"the liveliest little fellow breathing"—with "a face as gay as Garrick's, whom he was said greatly to resemble." [1]

Charles Lamb has described his father, the lawyer's clerk, under the name of Lovel, in his Essay on "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple":

"I knew this Lovel. He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty. A good fellow withal, and 'would strike.' In the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents. He once wrested a sword out of the hand of a man of quality that had drawn upon him, and pommelled him severely with the hilt of it. The swordsman had offered insult to a female—an occasion against which no odds against him could have prevented the interference of Lovel. He would stand next day bare-

[1] There is a portrait of John Lamb in Procter's *Memoir of Charles Lamb* which confirms this statement.

headed to the same person modestly to excuse his interference—for L. never forgot rank where something better was not concerned."

John Lamb had "a fine turn for humorous poetry." He could "mould heads" in plaster of Paris, could "turn cribbage-boards," take a hand at quadrille or bowls; and he made punch "better than any man of his degree in England." He had "the merriest quips and conceits, and was altogether as brimful of rogueries and inventions as you could desire." Little wonder that such a servant had become indispensable to Mr. Samuel Salt, the kindest and most easy-going of masters.

John Lamb was at once "his clerk, his good servant, his dresser, his friend, his 'flapper,' his guide, stop-watch, auditor, treasurer." Mr. Salt apparently did nothing without consulting John Lamb, "nor failed in anything without expecting and fearing his admonishing":

"He put himself almost too much in his hands, had they not been the purest in the world. He resigned his title almost to respect as a master, if L. could ever have forgotten for a moment that he was a servant."

And so it was that John Lamb and his wife Elizabeth, and old "Aunt Hetty," and the children, all lived in Mr. Salt's house in Crown Office Row, with almost as much sense of possession as if it had really belonged to them. And so it was that the Temple was the wonderful nursery of Charles Lamb;—that little world lying back from the noise and bustle of Fleet Street and the Strand, lapped by the waters of the Thames; the Temple of the end of the eighteenth century; the Temple of Dr. Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith, with all its still older centuries of splendid association shut within its gates. The Temple!—"its church, its halls, its gardens, its fountains, its river, I had almost said—for, in those

young years, what was this king of rivers to me but a stream that watered our pleasant places ? . . ."

Here, as a little fellow, he took his first surveys of life—usually holding his sister Mary's hand. Here he learned the trick of making the water of a certain fountain rise and fall, as if by magic, to the wonderment of other young urchins, as small as himself, but not so clever. Here he gazed up at the winged horse, and the frescoes of the Virtues—his " first hint of allegory." Here he spelt out the " moral inscriptions " on a sun-dial, and watched the dark line stealing so imperceptibly over its disc that never, never could even " the eye of childhood " detect its movement !

The brother and sister must have stood, in the gloom of the Temple Church, beside those dead, recumbent, silent-speaking giants ; and it was in the Temple, among the epitaphs, listening to the stately eulogies of the faultless dead, that the child looked up and asked the question, so characteristic of the " Elia " of later days—" But where do the naughty people lie ? "

And they often watched, from a safe distance, the old benchers, the giants of their own day,—the " fine face and person " of Samuel Salt himself among them—pacing the terrace, two and two, with " footsteps which made its pavement awful " ; walking and talking, " with both hands folded behind them for state, or one hand at least behind, the other carrying a cane."

" The old benchers had it almost sacred to themselves, in the forepart of the day at least. They might not be sided or jostled. Their air and dress asserted the parade."

The children had always thought of their father's master as an old bachelor ; and it was not till many years later, when master and servant were both dead, that Charles Lamb learnt the little romance of Samuel Salt's life,—the one year of wedded happiness, long

ago; the lady lost in childbed; the deep melancholy that followed, and from which the childless widower never thoroughly recovered. It explained much; it explained that "pensive gentility," that indolence of habit; the fact that Mr. Salt never laughed and never "trifled, or talked gallantly," or in fact paid even the most ordinary attention to the ladies, more than one of whom (but one especially, a sister of a colleague who paced the terrace) had "unravelled into beauty certain peculiarities of this very shy and retiring character."

And so, while the children always thought of Mr. Samuel Salt as an old bachelor, Mr. Samuel Salt did not object to the patter of little feet in the house in Crown Office Row, and was indeed to prove a kind friend and benefactor to John Lamb and his family.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD BLUE-COAT SCHOOL

JUST opposite to the Fleet Street entrance to the Temple is Fetter Lane, leading from Fleet Street into Holborn; and in Fetter Lane there was in those days, and for many a year afterwards, a school kept by a Mr. William Bird. It was a humble day-school, to which, however, a good many of the families of this neighbourhood sent their children to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic—the boys being taught in the morning, and the girls in the afternoon. The schoolroom looked into "a discoloured, dingy garden in the passage leading from Fetter Lane into Bartlett's Buildings"; and there Mr. Bird was for a time assisted by a very nervous young usher of the name of Starkey, who was woefully tormented by the pupils, and especially by some of the elder girls of the evening class.

Mr. and Mrs. Lamb sent at least two of their children—

Mary and Charles—to this school; and Mary Lamb was one of Starkey's pupils. But, by the time Charles was old enough to go to school, the hapless Starkey had been succeeded by a nephew of Mr. Bird's, a young man who afterwards graced the boards of Drury Lane Theatre; and Mr. Bird himself hovered over the class-room, "ferule" in hand, clad in "one of those flowered Indian gowns formerly in use with schoolmasters, the strange figures upon which we used to interpret into hieroglyphics of fear and suffering." [1]

For a short time, Charles Lamb was one of the little boys who sat elbowing each other, with legs wedged into the uncomfortable sloping desks, and fingers inky by much dipping into the little leaden ink-pots, "not separately subsisting, but sunk into the desks." With many sidelong looks into the dingy garden, he traced his first pot-hooks and hangers, and wrote his first copy, "Art improves Nature." And he was there long enough to gain a prize for spelling,—which he knew enough to know was wholly undeserved.

And then, in October 1782, Mr. Yeates, one of the governors of Christ's Hospital, a friend of Mr. Samuel Salt's, presented Charles Lamb to the foundation of that charity: "The son of John Lamb, scrivener, and Elizabeth, his wife." In his eighth year, a little delicate, sensitive fellow, with a stutter (he had nearly died of the smallpox when he was five years old) Charles Lamb was put into the dark-blue gown and red leather girdle and canary-yellow stockings of the Blue-coat School boy, and was turned about to be admired by the family in Crown Office Row—especially by Mary, who was now eighteen, and had nursed him through the smallpox, and by old Aunt Hetty, who used to say that this boy was "the only thing in the world she loved."

Christ's Hospital, founded by Edward VI, has, after

[1] *Captain Starkey*, by Charles Lamb.

more than three centuries of existence in the very heart of the great city, been removed from its old site in Newgate Street, into fresher air and healthier surroundings. Never again, in Newgate Street, will the Blue-coat boys be seen playing in that old yard behind the railings—the bare heads, the long blue skirts tucked up, and the little yellow legs. No doubt they are much healthier and happier where they now are. And yet, in spite of the old rough ways of the old Blue-coat School—its pageantries and its punishments—handed down from the days of Henry VIII and still persisting at the end of the eighteenth century, those seven years that Charles Lamb passed at Christ's Hospital were, on the whole, very happy years.[1]

Boyer—the Rev. James Boyer—was the very severe upper master of that day: the classics and coarse food and small beer and the birch loomed largely in the school routine. The dungeons, "little Bedlam cells," were still in use, and the scourge, penitential dress, and fetters for the wrists of small runaways. And Boyer's two wigs played an awful part in the children's lives—the dress-wig, smooth and powdered, and the "passionate wig," that Boyer put on when he meant business.

But for some reason, not fully explained, the ultra-Spartan discipline of the Blue-coat School was relaxed for little Charles Lamb. One would like to think it might have been the extreme smallness of the yellow legs—legs "almost immaterial" even in his later days—taken in conjunction with the extreme beauty of shape of the young dark head and the sweetness of a delicate child's smile, that gained for him those peculiar advantages which he certainly did enjoy. But it was more probably the fact that his father's master was Mr. Samuel Salt, a bencher of the Inner Temple, close at

[1] "Christ's Hospital" (*Essays of Elia*).

hand—a personal friend of his "governour's"; and that Mr. Randal Norris, the sub-treasurer of the Inner Temple, happened to be very fond of little Charles Lamb. The boy was allowed to go home "almost as often as he wished"; and in a few minutes—running from the corner of Newgate Street—he could be back in the house in Crown Office Row, or in the Temple Gardens, manipulating that fountain. He had his tea and hot rolls every morning, while the other boys "battened" on dry bread and small beer, poured into wooden piggins out of a leather black-jack. The "paternal kitchen" was allowed to furnish him with hot plates of roast veal; and old Aunt Hetty would come toddling across, with a basin under her apron, "squatting down upon some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters" till the little fellow could come and eat—with what feelings!

"There was love for the bringer; shame for the thing brought, and the manner of its bringing; sympathy for those who were too many to share in it—and, at the top of all, hunger! . . ."

Very different was this from poor Coleridge's experience, when he was crying, the first day of his return after the holidays:

"'Boy!' I remember Boyer saying to me. . . . 'Boy! the school is your father! Boy! the school is your mother! Boy! the school is your brother! the school is your sister! the school is your first cousin, and your second cousin, and all the rest of your relations! Let's have no more crying.'" [1]

On half-holidays, the Blue-coat boys wandered about the city, gazing into shop-windows, or presented themselves, time after time, to look at the lions in the Tower, to which they had access, "by courtesy immemorial." And in the summer they bathed together in the New River, where they wantoned "like young dace in the

[1] Coleridge's *Table Talk*.

streams." After all, it was the sense of companionship, quite as much as the "hot-loaf of the Temple," that made Charles Lamb so happy at the Blue-coat School.

> "I have had playmates, I have had companions,
> In my days of childhood, in my joyful schooldays——"

George Dyer, the absent-minded, was one of these; though he was already a "Grecian" when Lamb and Coleridge entered Christ's Hospital in 1782; and there were the two brothers Le Grice from Cornwall, who became "Grecians" also—Charles Le Grice, the clergyman, and Sam Le Grice, the affectionate "mad wag," who begged a commission of the Duke of Wellington—and got it. There was Jem White, "whose passion was for Shakespeare"; "my pleasant friend, Jem White," who afterwards gave the hot suppers to the little London chimney-sweeps.[1] But chief of all Charles Lamb's friends and comrades, the "companion of his serious thoughts" at school and afterwards, was the friendless boy from the Devonshire rectory—Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Charles Lamb was never more than "deputy-Grecian" at Christ's Hospital. He did not come under Boyer's tutelage till towards the end of his schooldays; and the Rev. Matthew Field, the under master, was a much gentler type of person, who never used the rod, and only flicked with the cane, and was not to be compared, as a teacher, with the passionate Boyer. But when Charles Lamb left school in November 1789, in his fifteenth year, he had read Virgil, Sallust, Terence, Lucian, and Xenophon, and was rather an adept at Latin composition. He saw his friends go on, as "Grecians," with exhibitions to Oxford and to Cambridge: Charles Lamb was to know these pleasant places only "in the vacation." It may have been his stammer that prevented all thought of the Church, and therefore of the Universities; or

[1] "In Praise of Chimney-sweeps" (*Essays of Elia*).

may have been other, family, reasons to keep him home. At fifteen, he had left the Blue-coat and was living once more with his family in Crown Office Row; and not long afterwards he obtained a situation in the South Sea House, in Threadneedle Street, of which Mr. Samuel Salt was a deputy-governor, and where Charles Lamb's elder brother, John, was already employed as a clerk.

CHAPTER III

A BOY'S DREAM

CHARLES LAMB may have looked back on the Temple as his splendid nursery, and the old Blue-coat School as the scene of his "joyful schooldays"; it was in Hertfordshire that the golden hours of youth were lived, to be remembered through a haze of sunshine and tears:

". . . the green plains of pleasant Hertfordshire."

The children were accustomed to spend their summer holidays with their Hertfordshire relations—the Gladmans, at the farmhouse of Mackery End, near Wheathampstead, and their grandmother Field, in the old dower-house of Blakesware. Mary Lamb, in one of her stories for children,[1] has described the intense happiness of the city-child of those old, pre-railway days, when, having fallen asleep on the journey, it woke to see "green fields on both sides of the chaise," and found itself "in the country," set down amid all the simple activities and jubilations of the farmyard, the vegetable-garden, and the orchard: "Oh, what a sweet place grandmama's orchard is!"

Fleet Street and the Strand—the sundial and the

[1] "The Young Mahometan" in *Mrs. Leicester's School.*

fountain of the Temple—were forgotten in the fascinating occupation of searching for eggs among the nettles, "round by the orchard hedge." . . . "If we could find eggs and violets too, what happy children we were!"

All days were holidays, yet every day had its lessons. They were not exactly the lessons of Fetter Lane—those inky reiterations of "Art improves Nature." In Hertfordshire, all knowledge was useful knowledge; imparted, on the return to Crown Office Row, in unforgettable words:

"Grandmama says a hen is not esteemed a very wise bird."

But it was the old mansion of Blakesware itself that made the deepest impression on the minds of these fanciful children. They had been accustomed to "snug firesides; the low-built roof; parlours ten feet by ten." At Blakesware—it was the dower-house of the Plumer family, and they did not often live there—the children found themselves in "peopled solitudes," surrounded by "the traces of the splendour of past inmates." Mary Lamb, in after life, remembered the toys of dead little ones; the tarnished, gilded battledore, and the shuttlecocks bereft of feathers; and the little marble satyr in the hall, on whose shoulder, every day in passing, she laid her hand "to feel how cold he was." In an old locked-up room, full of books, she had pored over a tattered volume, *Mahometanism Explained;* a "very improper book, for it contained a false history of Abraham and his descendants"; and it had taken an extraordinary hold on what her grandmother used to call "those poor, crazy, moythered brains of yours." The glamour of the East had filled that old book-room: in solitude and all child-seriousness, she embraced the Faith, and went about among the eggs and violets—and the nettles—in deadly fear of coming to the narrow bridge, no wider than a silken thread, on one side of

which all the people who were not Mahometans (and nobody in Crown Office Row was a Mahometan!) would slip, and drop "into the tremendous gulf that had no bottom."

Charles Lamb, as a little fellow, knew every nook and corner of the old house, and "wondered and worshipped everywhere." He never forgot its marble hall, and the medallions of the twelve Cæsars; nor the tapestried bedrooms, "all Ovid on the walls"; nor the family portraits, the pleasure-grounds, and the "triple terraces." The romance and beauty of this place—this English home—possessed him: it became a part of himself. What did it matter that the dear old grandmother was not exactly the mistress of the place, but only had honourable charge of it?—*He had made it his own:*

"To have the feeling of gentility, it is not necessary to have been born gentle."

The very portraits of those other people's ancestors seemed to smile at him, "reaching forward from the canvas, to recognise the new relationship." He felt that Blakesware belonged to him—Charles Lamb. And to-day most people will feel this too; for the old house has long since been levelled to the ground, and is vanished for ever; but the Essay of Elia remains.[1]

The grandmother seems to have been always ready to receive her London daughter's children: Charles Lamb must have been often with her at Blakesware—as a little delicate child, as a Blue-coat School boy, and as a young city clerk. If we are to believe the veiled autobiography of the *Essays*, he must have been still at the Blue-coat School, a "deputy-Grecian," reading and talking poetry with his friend Coleridge, when, during one of those summer holidays at Blakesware, he came under the spell of the "fair-hair'd maid."

[1] "Blakesmoor, in Hertfordshire."

". . . For seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever. . . ." [1]

Something—not much—is known of the identity of this Hertfordshire girl, the "Alice W——" of the *Essays*, the "Anna" of his earliest sonnets. She was living with her mother in a cottage in the village of Widford, and her real name was Ann Simmons. The boy and girl must have been a good deal together in those successive summers, in the "winding wood-walks" about Widford and Blakesware:

"Green winding walks, and shady pathways sweet."

And, as often as he could, Charles Lamb must have turned his back on the city and the South Sea House, and come knocking at the door of that particular one of a group of cottages in Widford village:

". . . The little cottage which she loved,
The cottage which did once my all contain."

It was a boy's dream; but it was not to be. There was to come a day when the cottage-door remained shut and the wood-walks were left empty

"I loved a love once, fairest among women.
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her——"

The reasons why—for they were several—must unfold themselves in a later chapter of Charles Lamb's life. Meantime, he was going daily to his work in the melancholy-looking house in Threadneedle Street, where his elder brother, John—twelve years older than himself—had been already some years a clerk, and was now living, in chambers of his own, a rather selfish bachelor existence. The elder brother does not seem to have troubled himself much about his family: what he earned, he spent on himself; though for the last few years the hands of the clock had not stood still in

[1] "Dream-Children" (*Essays of Elia*).

the house in Crown Office Row. His father had been in Mr. Salt's service for more than forty years: master and servant alike were growing old.

In 1786, before Charles Lamb left the Blue-coat School, Mr. Salt had been ill, and had been nursed in his illness, with much care and attention, by Mrs. Lamb. During, or after, this illness, Mr. Salt had made his will, in which he left to his old servant, John Lamb, now almost past work, £500 in South Sea stock; and to Mrs. Lamb, "well deserved for her care and attention during my illness," he left £100, increased by a later codicil to £200—which may have meant that Mr. Salt had again been ill, and again been nursed by Mrs. Lamb. And the kind old bencher, anxious to go on helping his old servant even after his own death, had directed his executors to employ John Lamb in collecting certain "exchequer annuities," and to pay him £10 a year so long as he should continue to do so.

In 1792—the last year of his life—Mr. Salt obtained for Charles Lamb, the younger son, then seventeen, a better appointment than the one he was holding in the South Sea House. This was a clerkship in the accountant's office of the East India House, with a salary beginning at £70. It was Samuel Salt's last act of kindness to the family of his old servant. He died in 1792; and Charles Lamb, a boy of seventeen, earning £70 a year, found himself in the important position of chief bread-winner of the little family. And the old bencher dead, the old house in Crown Office Row was to be dismantled: John Lamb and his family must find a lodging elsewhere.

It must have been a sad day for Charles and Mary—Mary, who at twenty-seven was earning what she could, after the manner of her time, "by her needle"—when they watched Mr. Samuel Salt's books, that "spacious closet of good old English reading," to which

they had both had such generous access all those happy years, dispersed and packed and carted away.

Somebody else was very sad too—poor Miss Susannah Pierson, who for forty years had cherished a hopeless passion for Samuel Salt; a passion which nothing—not even the "long-resolved yet gently-enforced puttings-off of unrelenting bachelorhood"—could extinguish or abate.

The solitary lady was seen walking up and down Bedford Row, "in the cold evening-time," weeping big tears, "because her friend had died that day." And her friend, who had died that day, had requited the forty years of hopeless devotion by leaving Miss Susannah Pierson, in his very last codicil, "some tokens of his regard"—£500, his own particular silver ink-stand, which had never supplied the ink for the love-letter she would so infinitely have preferred, and some of his beloved books; his Pope, Swift, Shakespeare, Addison, and Steele, with Sherlocke's *Sermons* and any other volumes she might like to select out of his library; hoping that "by reading and reflection" they would "make her life more comfortable."

Perhaps they did—even if she never opened them.

CHAPTER IV

AN AWAKENING

It is not known where the Lamb family were housed after they left Crown Office Row; but four years later, in 1796, they were all living in lodgings in Little Queen Street, Holborn—Mr. and Mrs. Lamb, Aunt Hetty, Mary, and Charles.

The four years had been rather a chapter of misfortunes; not so much on account of poverty, for, putting all their little means together, they had enough to live upon. But the mother had been ill, and the father's

mind was failing; and old Aunt Hetty was fit for nothing but to sit with a "good book" on her lap, mumbling softly to herself. It was on Mary that the cares of the little family devolved, and the burdens of life fell heaviest.

Mary's education had been neglected since the days of Starkey's tuition in Fetter Lane; but for some years she had earned her living "by her needle," taking in work at home; and now, with her mother, father, and aunt dependent on her for their comforts by night and day, she had taken a little apprentice girl to help her with the needlework. Of their three children, Mary—the most devoted and dutiful of all—had always been the one to cause the parents, and especially the placid Hertfordshire mother, anxiety. They knew there was a history of insanity on the father's side of the family, and that all their children were more or less nervous and excitable. John, the "dear little selfish, craving John" of their first married years, had developed into the big, genial, selfish John of the South Sea House; a young man of "jolly, handsome presence," but an egoist, and morbidly sensitive about pain—unable to bear even the sight of physical suffering. Charles, the "weakly but very pretty babe," had always been a highly-strung, nervous boy, with a stammer; and as for Mary, they could not but remember how she, as a child, had come home from Blakesware with her little "moythered" brains filled with Mahometanism; how, unknown to anybody, she had worked herself up into a fever of apprehension, and in the middle of one night had awakened her placid mother out of a sound sleep, to beg her to "*be so kind as to become a Mahometan.*" On that occasion, Mrs. Lamb had very sensibly sent for the doctor; and, by Mary's own account, the doctor and his kind wife had fetched her away in their carriage to their own house, and there watched and humoured

and soothed her back to healthy childhood. But Mary had been subject all her life to fits of nervous depression; and at times, when she was overworked and overwrought, "worn down to a state of nervous misery," passing Bethlehem Hospital (the "Bedlam" of that day) she would wonder drearily if she were not fated to end her days there.

It was different, during those four years, for Charles. He was at least able to set out every morning regularly for the East India House. For him, winter and summer, there was the morning walk through the city, by Cheapside and Cornhill—the bells of St. Paul's ringing—to the great house in Leadenhall Street, and his own particular desk and stool. There were the other clerks; the big ledgers—even indigo had its romance in those first days; and, hidden away in his desk, he could keep the little bits of excessively untidy manuscript—his mild imitations of Bowles, and a boy's rhapsody about the "shivering joys" imparted by the tones of Mrs. Siddons's voice. He was always touching up his little sonnets, hoarding them to show to Coleridge. For Coleridge, in those years, had been living through his own period of storm and stress; his Cambridge days, and love-episodes, and barracks *entr'acte;* his pantisocracy dream, and his friendship and quarrel with Southey; and he was now married to Sara Fricker, and living in a country cottage; and Charles Lamb, in his letters, was sending little postscript messages to "Sara," who wrote little poems too. But whenever, during those years, Coleridge happened to be in London, he and Charles had met in the sanded parlour of the "Salutation and Cat" in Newgate Street—close to the Old Blue-coat School—where they spent glorious evenings together:

". . . The little smoky room at the 'Salutation and Cat,' where we have sat together through the winter nights, beguiling the cares of life with poesy."

And when Coleridge was not in London, Charles could write to him; wonderful boy letters they were; rich in feeling, full of poetry-making and laughter and tears. And sometimes, after office hours, there would be the pit of the theatre, which was always close at hand; the London playhouse of the close of the eighteenth century:

"Even so, thou, SIDDONS, meltest my sad heart."

In their palmier days, the Lamb family had been great theatre-goers. At the tender age of six, Charles Lamb had been taken by the "elder folks" to his first play, and had stood outside the pit entrance of the Old Drury, "Garrick's Drury," and listened, never to forget, to the cry of the "theatrical fruiteresses":

"Chase [1] some oranges, chase some numparels,[2] chase a bill of the play!"

To the last hour of his life, Charles Lamb was never to feel anything in drama as he felt that first play:

"Once the bell sounded. It was to ring out yet once again—and, incapable of the anticipation, I reposed my shut eyes in a sort of resignation upon the maternal lap. It rang the second time. The curtain drew up—I was not past six years old, and the play was Artaxerxes!" [3]

And now he went to the play by himself; for he was twenty—and in love. Not with Mrs. Siddons, though her voice had thrilled him through and through, "melting his sad heart"; not with anybody within the precincts of "Garrick's Drury"; but with a girl with blue eyes and "the bright yellow Hertfordshire hair," with whom he had wandered in Hertfordshire lanes.

The grandmother Field was no longer at Blakesware: she had died in the same year as Mr. Samuel Salt, and was buried in Widford Churchyard. Old Blakesware

[1] Choose. [2] Nonpareils. [3] "My First Play" (*Essays of Elia*).

House was closed to Charles Lamb; and it is possible that Ann Simmons too may have moved away from the little village. But there is reason to believe that Charles Lamb, weighted as he was by family cares, was still pressing his suit, "in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair," when, in the winter of 1795, something must have happened to bring him up sharply against the inevitable, and make the sensitive young brain reel. A few months later, he wrote to Coleridge:

"My life has been somewhat diversified of late. The six weeks that finished last year and began this, your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a madhouse, at Hoxton. I am got somewhat rational now, and don't bite anyone. But mad I was; and many a vagary my imagination played with me, enough to make a volume, if all were told. . . . Coleridge, it may convince you of my regards for you when I tell you my head ran on you in my madness, as much almost as on another person, who I am inclined to think was the more immediate cause of my temporary frenzy."

There was to be no recurrence of this attack. The "tide of melancholy" was to rush on him sometimes, leaving a "stupor that makes me indifferent to the hopes and fears of this life"; but he was never to know, for himself at least, the inside of the prison-house again. In his whimsical manner, he told Coleridge that he sometimes looked back at the time spent in Hoxton Asylum "with a gloomy kind of envy"; for, while it lasted, he "had many, many hours of pure happiness."

"Dream not, Coleridge, of having tasted all the grandeur and wildness of fancy till you have gone mad!"

This was in June 1796. Mary had known all about Ann Simmons, and poor Charles's hopeless attachment; and she had been very tender with the young brother, "sore galled with disappointed hope." She had been half mother, half sister to him, ever since the days of the

Temple Gardens, when he was a very little fellow, holding on to her hand. He showed her the sonnets to Anna:

> ". . . Oh Anna, mild-eyed maid!
> Beloved! . . . . . ."

And of course Mary thought them absolutely perfect. What *could* be more beautiful?

> ". . . And does the lonely glade
> Still court the footsteps of the fair-hair'd maid?
> Still in her locks the gales of summer sigh?
> While I forlorn do wander, reckless where,
> And 'mid my wanderings meet no Anna there."

The sister had done all she could to comfort a boy's care-crazed mind; and when the poor boy was shut up in Hoxton Asylum, he wrote, in a "lucid interval," a little sonnet to Mary—a sad little sonnet (for he had evidently been cross and irritable to her), beginning—

> "If from my lips some angry accents fell,
> Peevish complaint or harsh reproof unkind,"

and ending—

> ". . . Thou to me didst ever show
> Kindest affection; and would oft-times lend
> An ear to the desponding love-sick lay,
> Weeping my sorrows with me, who repay
> But ill the mighty debt of love I owe,
> Mary, to thee, my sister and my friend."

He did not know, when he was writing this, how soon he was to be called upon to repay that mighty debt. And, in the meantime, the event of the moment to the convalescent boy and to the sympathetic Mary must have been the appearance, in the spring of 1796, of Coleridge's *Poems on Various Subjects*, published by Coleridge's friend and admirer, Cottle of Bristol. For the volume contained, not only the poems by Coleridge, which Charles had already criticised and enthused over in many letters to his friend, but also four of his own sonnets—sonnets about Anna and Hertfordshire, and the sonnet to Mrs. Siddons, which

had appeared so long previously as 1794 in the columns of the *Morning Chronicle*. It is easy to imagine the heads of the brother and sister bent together over Coleridge's preface, and especially over the paragraph that ran: "The effusions signed 'C. L.' were written by Mr. Charles Lamb of the India House; independently of their signature, their superior merit would have sufficiently distinguished them." And while Mary said "Of course," perhaps Charles was wondering how, if ever, the book, and the sonnets, and especially that little sentence in the preface about "Mr. Charles Lamb of the India House," would be looked on by those mild blue eyes in Hertfordshire.

CHAPTER V

THE MIGHTY DEBT

THE London *Times* and other papers of Monday, Sept. 26, 1796, published, without giving any names, the details of a tragedy that had occurred on the previous Thursday in a house "in the neighbourhood of Holborn."

A lady had died in consequence of a wound inflicted by the hand of her daughter. It appeared that, while the family were making ready for dinner, the daughter, seizing a knife from the table, had pursued a little girl—her apprentice—round the room, and then suddenly turned on her own mother, who had intervened, and stabbed her to the heart. The child's cries had brought assistance, but too late. A coroner's jury, sitting next day, had "of course" brought in the verdict—*lunacy*.

A paragraph in the *True Briton* stated that the daughter's "carriage towards her mother" had always been "affectionate in the extreme," and that she had lately been nursing her mother through an illness, "by

day and by night." And some of the papers contradicted, as "without foundation," a report that "the young lady had an insane brother in confinement."

In all the first horror of the event, poor Charles wrote off to Coleridge:

"My dearest Friend,—White, or some of my friends, or the public papers, by this time may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines. My poor dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses. I eat, and drink, and sleep, and have my judgment, I believe, very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr. Norris,[1] of the Blue-coat School, has been very, very kind to us, and we have no other friend; but, thank God, I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write as religious a letter as possible, but no mention of what is gone and done with. With me 'the former things are passed away,' and I have something more to do than to feel.

"God Almighty have us all in His keeping!

"C. Lamb.

"Mention nothing of poetry. I have destroyed every vestige of past vanities of that kind. Do as you please,[2] but if you publish, publish mine (I give free leave) without name or initial, and never send me a book, I charge you.

[1] Mr. Randal Norris, sub-treasurer of the Inner Temple, a life-long friend of Charles Lamb. It is not known what connection he had with the Blue-coat School.

[2] Coleridge was preparing a second edition of his *Poems*, with additional poems in it by Charles Lamb.

"Your own judgment will convince you not to take any notice of this yet to your dear wife.[1] You look after your family; I have my reason and strength left to take care of mine. I charge you, don't think of coming to see me. Write. I will not see you if you come. God Almighty love you and all of us

"C. LAMB."

Coleridge must have answered quickly. A few days later, Charles wrote again:

"Your letter was an inestimable treasure to me. It will be a comfort to you, I know, to know that our prospects are somewhat brighter. My poor dear, dearest sister, the unhappy and unconscious instrument of the Almighty's judgments on our house, is restored to her senses,—to a dreadful sense and recollection of what has passed, awful to her mind, and impressive (as it must be to the end of life), but tempered with religious resignation and the reasonings of a sound judgment, which, in this early stage, knows how to distinguish between a deed committed in a transient fit of frenzy and the terrible guilt of a mother's murder. I have seen her. I found her, this morning, calm and serene; far, very, very far, from an indecent, forgetful serenity; she has a most affectionate and tender concern for what has happened. Indeed, from the beginning—frightful and hopeless as her disorder seemed—I had confidence enough in her strength of mind and religious principle, to look forward to a time when *even she* might recover tranquillity. God be praised, Coleridge! wonderful as it is to tell, I have never once been otherwise than collected and calm; even on the dreadful day, and in the midst of the terrible scene, I preserved a tranquillity which bystanders may have construed into indifference —a tranquillity not of despair. Is it folly or sin in me

[1] Mrs. Coleridge's first child was born soon after.

to say that it was a religious principle that *most* supported me? I allow much to other favourable circumstances. I felt that I had something else to do than to regret. On that first evening my aunt was lying insensible—to all appearance like one dying; my father, with his poor forehead plaistered over, from a wound he had received from a daughter, dearly loved by him, and who loved him no less dearly; my mother a dead and murdered corpse in the next room; yet was I wonderfully supported. I closed not my eyes in sleep that night, but lay without terrors and without despair. I have lost no sleep since. I had been long used not to rest in things of sense,—had endeavoured after a comprehension of mind, unsatisfied with the 'ignorant present time,' and this kept me up. I had the whole weight of the family thrown on me; for my brother, little disposed (I speak not without tenderness for him) at any time to take care of old age and infirmities, had now, with his bad leg, an exemption from such duties, and I was now left alone. . . .

"Our friends have been very good. Sam Le Grice, who was then in town, was with me the first three or four days, and was as a brother to me; gave up every hour of his time, to the very hurting of his health and spirits, in constant attendance and humouring my poor father; talked with him, read to him, played at cribbage with him (for so short is the old man's recollection that he was playing at cards, as though nothing had happened, while the coroner's inquest was sitting over the way!). Samuel wept tenderly when he went away, for his mother wrote him a very severe letter on his loitering so long in town, and he was forced to go.

"Mr. Norris, of Christ's Hospital, has been as a father to me—Mrs. Norris as a mother; though we had few claims on them. A gentleman, brother to my godmother, from whom we never had right or reason to expect

any such assistance, sent my father twenty pounds; and to crown all these God's blessings to our family at such a time, an old lady, a cousin of my father and aunt's, a gentlewoman of fortune, is to take my aunt and make her comfortable for the short remainder of her days. My aunt is recovered, and as well as ever, and highly pleased at thoughts of going—and has generously given up the interest of her little money (which was formerly paid my father for her board) wholely and solely to my sister's use. Reckoning this, we have, Daddy and I, for our two selves and an old maid-servant to look after him, when I am out, which will be necessary, £170 (or £180 rather) a year, out of which we can spare £50 or £60 at least for Mary while she stays at Islington, where she must and shall stay during her father's life, for his and her comfort. I know John will make speeches about it, but she shall not go into an hospital. The good lady of the madhouse, and her daughter, an elegant, sweet-behaved young lady, love her, and are taken with her amazingly; and I know from her own mouth she loves them, and longs to be with them as much. Poor thing, they say she was but the other morning saying she knew she must go to Bethlem for life; that one of her brothers would have it so, but the other would wish it not, but be obliged to go with the stream; that she had often as she passed Bethlem thought it likely, 'here it may be my fate to end my days,' conscious of a certain flightiness in her poor head oftentimes, and mindful of more than one severe illness of that nature before. A legacy of £100, which my father will have at Christmas, and that £20 I mentioned before, with what is in the house, will much more than set us clear. If my father, an old servant-maid, and I, can't live, and live comfortably, on £130 or £120 a year, we ought to burn by slow fires; and I almost would, that Mary might not go into an hospital. Let

me not leave one unfavourable impression on your mind respecting my brother. Since this has happened, he has been very kind and brotherly; but I fear for his mind: he has taken his ease in the world, and is not fit himself to struggle with difficulties, nor has much accustomed himself to throw himself into their way; and I know his language is already, 'Charles, you must take care of yourself, you must not abridge yourself of a single pleasure you have been used to,' &c. &c., and in that style of talking. But you, a Necessarian, can respect a difference of mind, and love what *is amiable* in a character not perfect. He has been very good; but I fear for his mind. Thank God, I can unconnect myself with him, and shall manage all my father's monies in future myself, if I take charge of Daddy, which poor John has not even hinted a wish, at any future time even, to share with me. The lady at this madhouse assures me that I may dismiss immediately both doctor and apothecary, retaining occasionally a composing draught or so for a while; and there is a less expensive establishment in her house, where she will not only have a room and nurse to herself for £50 or guineas a year—the outside would be £60. You know by economy how much more even I shall be able to spare for her comforts. She will, I fancy, if she stays, make one of the family, rather than of the patients; and the old and young ladies I like exceedingly, and she loves dearly; and they, as the saying is, take to her very extraordinarily, if it is extraordinary that people who see my sister should love her. Of all the people I ever saw in the world, my poor sister was most and thoroughly devoid of the least tincture of selfishness. I will enlarge upon her qualities, poor dear, dearest soul, in a future letter, for my own comfort, for I understand her thoroughly; and, if I mistake not, in the most trying situation that a human being can be found in, she will be found (I speak not with sufficient humility,

I fear, but humanly and foolishly speaking)—she will be found, I trust, uniformly great and amiable. God keep her in her present mind!—to whom be thanks and praise for all His dispensations to mankind."

It is impossible to approach a chapter of human life such as this—so unique in its horror and its helplessness—with any mental preconception of the nature and complexity of the human feelings involved. The reader's attitude must be that of scientific observation, not of biographical criticism. It is obvious that in these letters, written in a state of mental exaltation, some feelings are passionately expressed, and others as resolutely kept unspoken. To come to any understanding of why this should be—of the boy's state of mind when he wrote this letter—one thing must be realised. The woman who committed the act was the "unconscious instrument." Nobody had the faintest suspicion that her feelings towards the mother were other than those of tender love and supreme devotion. It was as if she had stood by, paralysed, and seen another commit the act. And the boy—son and brother—from that first moment when he reached the scene in time to take the knife from Mary's hand, realised that the Nemesis that had overtaken them had demanded, not one sacrifice, but two: that, while the one sacrifice was the poor, placid, dead mother, whom nothing could touch further, the other was the still-living creature, racked on the same sacrificial altar—both victims of the same great, inscrutable, sacrificial Law: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

And so, in the hour of supreme effort, the boy, in self-preservation, had shut back certain feelings; his passionate tenderness and regret were to come in paroxysms. "Indignation, the rage of grief, something like remorse" rushed upon the mind of the poor boy when he knelt by the dead mother, "who, through life,

wished nothing but her children's welfare." But he kept these feelings resolutely behind him:

"The former things are passed away. I have something more to do than to feel."

Mrs. Lamb was buried in the churchyard of St. Andrew's, Holborn. Mary was for some months in an asylum; but, after a time, under special conditions (it has been thought that application was made to the Home Secretary) Charles was allowed to take her out of restraint; and his guardianship was accepted as security for the future. He never brought her home during the father's lifetime, and the father lived for two years longer.

Meantime, Charles and his father, with their old servant, set up housekeeping in a little corner house in Chapel Street, Pentonville. Aunt Hetty, who was not at all happy with the rich relation, had very soon returned to them. During those last two years of his father's life, Charles made it his practice to spend his days at his desk in the India House, his evenings playing cribbage with the old man, and his Sundays and holidays with Mary. It was perhaps at this time that he began going with Mary to the Unitarian chapel at Hackney, and finding comfort in the gentle limitations and illimitable simplicity of the Unitarian's creed. His letters to Coleridge about this time are imbued with Unitarianism. He sympathised, like a woman, with his restless friend: "May your soul," he wrote, "find peace at last in your cottage life." He was proud to be Coleridge's friend and brother-confessor, but he quite frankly reasoned with him in matters where they disagreed. Charles Lamb was a keen critic as well as an enthusiastic friend. At this time he was influencing Coleridge towards Unitarianism; combating a mysticism that seemed to lead to the idolatrous; "mystical notions, and the pride of metaphysics." He

warned Coleridge against trying to bring together "the feeble narrow-sphered operations of the human intellect, and the everywhere diffused mind of Deity, the peerless wisdom of Jehovah." He knew that the phrase "a partaker of the Divine Nature" was to be met with in Scripture; but he feared that a meaning was in these days affixed to it which the simple fishermen of Galilee had never intended to convey. He appealed rather for the "humility of genuine piety," which looked to the heavenly Father, rejoicing in the names "dear children," "brethren," seeking to know no further. . . .

And he and Mary, children indeed, were reading books together; for reading, Charles told Coleridge, had been Mary's daily bread ever since the days when they had both been allowed to "browse" among the old folios in Mr. Salt's library.

Gently and patiently the young brother was bringing her back from the land of shadows. It was he now that took her hand, she who put her hand in his. Looking up at him, she was not afraid. "The spirit of my mother," she told him, "seems to descend and smile upon me, bidding me live to enjoy the life and reason which the Almighty has given me. . . ."

CHAPTER VI

IMMORTAL FRIENDSHIPS

EVEN in those first dreary months following the tragedy, and while Mary was still in the asylum, Charles had been persuaded to recall his impetuous words "mention nothing of poetry: if you publish, publish mine without name or initial." For Coleridge was preparing a second edition of his poems—it was about a year in preparation, and appeared in the summer of 1797—and Charles, who had contributed the four little sonnets to the first

edition, had been called upon for more. Charles, as the preface to this second edition sets forth, had "communicated" to Coleridge "a complete collection of all his poems"; and he had also sent with them a little motto, or dedication, which he wished to see printed immediately under the imposing title-page to his portion of the volume: "Poems, by Charles Lamb of the India House":

MOTTO

"This beauty, in the blossom of my youth,
When my first fire knew no adulterate incense,
Nor I no way to flatter but my fondness,
In the best language my true tongue could tell me,
And all the broken sighs my sick heart lend me,
I sued and served. Long did I love this lady."

MASSINGER.

THE DEDICATION

The few following Poems,
Creatures of the Fancy and the Feeling
In Life's more vacant hours,
Produced, for the most part, by
Love in Idleness,
are,
With all a Brother's fondness,
Inscribed to
MARY ANNE LAMB,
The author's best friend and sister.

"This," wrote Charles to Coleridge, "is the pomp and paraphernalia of parting with which I take leave of a passion which has reigned so royally (so long) within me; thus, with its trappings of laureatship, I fling it off, pleased and satisfied with myself that the weakness troubles me no longer. I am wedded, Coleridge, to the fortunes of my sister and my poor old father. . . ."

So he took leave of the Anna of his dreams: "'Twas a weakness, concerning which I may say, in the words of Petrarch (whose Life is open before me), 'if it drew me

out of some vices, it also prevented the growth of many virtues.'"

The verses to which he now looked with satisfaction—"which profit me in the recollection," as he expressed it—were his sonnet to Mary, written in a lucid interval, and those lines on the dear old "grandame," about whose memory clung all the romance of his Hertfordshire childhood.

> ". . . On the green hill top,
> Hard by the house of prayer, a modest roof,
> And not distinguished from its neighbour barn,
> Save by a slender-tapering length of spire,
> The Grandame sleeps. . . ."

The mind of this solitary boy of two-and-twenty was now wholly set back in the domestic past: "the days, Coleridge, of a *mother's* fondness for her *schoolboy*. What would I not give to call her back to earth for *one* day!—on my knees to ask her pardon for all those little asperities of temper which, from time to time, have given her gentle spirit pain! . . ."

So, at his desk at the India House, or on his way back and forward between Leadenhall Street and Pentonville, he was living over again the life of Crown Office Row and the old Blue-coat School. It was only "two Christmases ago"—but what a gulf between!—since he and Coleridge were writing sonnets together in "that nice little smoky room at the 'Salutation,' which is even now continually presenting itself to my recollection, with all its associated train of pipes, tobacco, egg-hot, welsh-rabbit, metaphysics, and poetry.—Are we *never* to meet again?"

There did not seem to be much chance; for Coleridge was just then moving his little household to Nether Stowey, hoping to find peace in a market-garden, and Charles Lamb was very much in Chapel Street, Pentonville.

"I am got home at last," he wrote to Coleridge; "and, after repeated games at cribbage, have got my father's leave to write awhile; with difficulty got it, for when I expostulated about playing any more, he very aptly replied, 'If you won't play with me, you might as well not come home at all.' The argument was unanswerable, and I set to afresh."

The sordid anxieties of life pressed hard on the boy. Poverty and sickness had left him "somewhat nonplussed."

"My poor old aunt, whom you have seen, the kindest, goodest creature to me when I was at school; who used to toddle there to bring me good things, when I, schoolboy like, only despised her for it, and used to be ashamed to see her come and sit herself down on the old coal-hole steps, as you went into the old grammar school, and open her apron, and bring out her bason, with some nice thing she had caused to be saved for me; the good old creature is now lying on her death-bed . . . she says, poor thing, she is glad she is come home to die with me."

Aunt Hetty died early in 1797; and about the same time two other things happened. Mary was removed from the asylum to lodgings in Hackney, and Charles Lamb made a new literary friend.

This was Charles Lloyd, "a young gentleman of fortune," son of the fine old Birmingham philanthropist and banker; an amiable young Quaker, who did not like banking, and did, very much, like poetry.[1] Lloyd, who had been living at Bristol for the sake of Coleridge's literary companionship, and was also a contributor to the new edition of Coleridge's poems, had evidently heard so much from Coleridge about poor Charles Lamb, that—being one day in London—he came knocking at Lamb's door. Of course Lamb celebrated the occasion in verse:

[1] Lloyd's sister married Christopher Wordsworth (afterwards Master of Trinity College, Cambridge), brother of the poet.

"Alone, obscure, without a friend,
A cheerless, solitary thing,
Why seeks my Lloyd the stranger out?
What offering can the stranger bring?

. . . . . .

Long, long, within my aching heart,
The grateful sense shall cherished be;
I'll think less meanly of myself,
That Lloyd will sometimes think of me."

Lloyd was so pleased with his new friend that for a time he took up his abode at the "Bull and Mouth," the old coaching-inn in St. Martin's-le-Grand, known even before the Fire of London as a rendezvous of the Quakers. He settled down in London to be near Lamb, as, before, he settled in Bristol to be with Coleridge; and Charles Lamb, as was to be expected, came quickly under the charm of the Quaker's gentle nature. Cowper, "the divine chit-chat" of Cowper, had of late succeeded Bowles's sonnets in Lamb's poetic affections. He felt a special sympathy for Cowper, a fellow-sufferer in "the sorest malady of all." But he read omnivorously: Beaumont and Fletcher, Bürger, Massinger, Izaak Walton, Rousseau's *Confessions*, besides, of course, Southey, and always Coleridge's own poems, as fast as they were written. Now, fascinated by Lloyd (Lloyd, too, was afterwards to suffer, like Cowper, from "the sorest malady of all"), Lamb took to reading Penn and Woolman; Lloyd, he declared, was almost turning him Quaker. "I am dearly fond of Charles Lloyd," he wrote. "He is all goodness." And Lloyd's visit—though Lloyd at the "Bull and Mouth" was a very different thing from Coleridge at the "Salutation and Cat"—did put heart into the solitary boy. And when July came, and the volume of poems was through the press, and Leadenhall Street was getting very hot and stuffy, the India House authorities gave Charles a holiday, and he shut up his desk and set off by coach to visit Coleridge at

Nether Stowey. Coleridge's wife was very kind to him, and little Hartley, "the minute philosopher," of whom he had heard so much in letters, was cutting his teeth. Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, just come to Alfoxden, were often with the Coleridges. Southey and his wife were in Hampshire, and Lloyd was living with them; and, on his way home, Lamb stayed with the Southeys too. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, all in one summer holiday! It was a very happy holiday for Charles Lamb; though it was then that Coleridge, when he had hurt his foot, and everybody else went out for a walk, wrote "This lime-tree bower my prison," and made poor Lamb wince under the epithet "my gentle-hearted Charles." And the visit ended, as the visits of poets will:

"You will oblige me by sending me my greatcoat, which I left behind, in the oblivious state the mind is thrown into at parting. Is it not ridiculous that I sometimes envy that greatcoat lingering so cunningly behind! At present I have none; so send it to me by a Stowey waggon, if there be such a thing. . . ."

And he goes on to say how stupid he had felt, "most like a sulky child," among them all. "But company and converse are strange to me. It was kind in you all to endure me as you did."

CHAPTER VII

"ROSAMUND GRAY"

BACK in London, after that summer holiday, poor Charles was depressed, gloomy, and irritable. The dreaded anniversary came round; and his depression may be read in the lines "Written a year after the Events," and "Written on Christmas Day, 1797."

Something also had come between him and Coleridge:

was it the Wordsworths, brother and sister, with whom Coleridge was spending so much of his time, writing *Lyrical Ballads* as they wandered on the Quantock Hills? There had been noticeable a tinge of patronage in Coleridge's manner, which had hurt Charles; and Coleridge had not only forgotten to write of late, but had forgotten to send back the greatcoat:

"I wish you would send me my greatcoat. The snow and the rain season is at hand, and I have but a wretched old coat, once my father's, to keep 'em off. . . . Meet emblem wilt thou be, Old Winter, of a friend's neglect—cold, cold, cold!"

There had been a day—not so long ago, but before the "Events"—when Charles Lamb had been able to give Coleridge a helping hand:

"Dear Coleridge," runs a letter dated May 1796, "make yourself perfectly easy about May. I paid his bill when I sent your clothes. I was flush of money, and am so still to all the purposes of a single life; so give yourself no further concern about it. The money would be superfluous to me if I had it."

If Charles remembered this now, he certainly never said so; and he never would hear of Coleridge's paying him back that £15. None the less he winced under the epithet "gentle-hearted," for, in spite of his shyness, and his stammer, and his poverty, there was nothing unmanly about Charles Lamb. To him, Coleridge, seen in his home with Sara and the baby, may have appeared only half a hero: if Charles Lamb had had a wife and child, he would have managed to support them somehow. And, at this time, he was feeling very sore, and inclined to pick a quarrel with everybody. He had "well-nigh quarrelled with Charles Lloyd." For Lloyd, though he was "all goodness," did not fully appreciate Lamb's line of conduct about Mary; and Mary and the old father—"my little family," as Charles Lamb called

them—were very dear to him. With the best intentions, Lloyd was for drawing him into the literary world, and away from them; and so he quarrelled with Lloyd. It was in the lowest depth of depression, in that January 1798, that he wrote the lines, since become so famous:

THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES

Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?

I had a mother, but she died, and left me,
Died prematurely, in a day of horrors—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful schooldays—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a love once, fairest among women,
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man.[1]
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse,
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than brother![2]
Why wert thou not born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces.

For some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

A month or two later Coleridge had left Stowey, to act as assistant to a Unitarian minister in Shrewsbury;

[1] Lloyd. [2] Coleridge.

it was just before he accepted the Wedgwoods' allowance of £150 a year for life. Lloyd, the kind friend whom Lamb had "left abruptly," had been in London, and they had made up their little quarrel. Lamb, though professing himself to be "jealous of human helps and leaning-places," found himself wonderfully comforted by "Lloyd's smile." Very soon after the writing of this poem, they were publishing together a little half-crown volume of "Blank verse by Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb"; and when in those same months Charles sat himself down of an evening in the window of his little parlour to write his prose-romance of *Rosamund Gray* (Lloyd was writing a novel, too), he took his heroine's name (nothing else) from one of Lloyd's songs, written a year or two before. As Charles wrote, the moon shone in at his window; and the moonlight idealised even Chapel Street, Pentonville.

The *Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret* has long been reckoned one of Lamb's most exquisite bits of prose-writing, though, as a story—a work of art—it is as crude as it is exquisite. The plot, if it can be called a plot, was suggested by a line or two of an old ballad:

> "An old woman clothed in grey,
> Whose daughter was charming and young,
> And she was deluded away
> By Roger's false flattering tongue."

"Nothing else," wrote Lamb to Southey, "but the words of that foolish ballad, put me upon scribbling my *Rosamund*."

The story is a strange medley of the real and autobiographic, told with almost Pre-Raphaelite detail, and the purely fictitious, clothed in a boy's riotous imagination. For the scene of the story is laid in the village of Widford, in Hertfordshire. Old Margaret bears strong resemblance to the Grandmother Field, of Blakesware. Allan Clare, the boy-lover, the "sweet-

dispositioned youth," is what Charles Lamb was, or wished to be. There are shadowy forms, suggestive of Coleridge, the friend, and Mary, the elder sister. The cottage is "Blenheims," where Ann Simmons really lived; and Rosamund Gray is Charles Lamb's ideal of womanhood, his fair-haired maid—"the most beautiful young creature that eyes ever beheld."

"Her face had the sweetest expression in it, a gentleness—a modesty—a timidity—a certain charm—a grace without a name. There was a sort of melancholy mingled with her smile . . . something which the poet Young might have remembered when he composed that perfect line:

'Soft, modest, melancholy, female, fair.'

She was a mild-eyed maid, and everybody loved her Young Allan Clare, when but a boy, sighed for her."

. . . . . .

"He was never happier than when he could get Rosamund to walk out with him. He would make her admire the scenes he admired—fancy the wild-flowers he fancied—watch the clouds he was watching—and not unfrequently repeat to her poetry which he loved, and make her love it. . . ."

There, in effect, the realities end and the riotous imagination begins. A villain, Matravis, comes into the plot, the impersonation of "black manhood"; and the story that opens in innocence and sunshine finishes in night and silence, in horror and anguish and despair. The fate of Rosamund Gray is a dark and tragic fate; whereas the only tragic thing about the real story of Charles Lamb and Ann Simmons is that Ann Simmons did not marry Charles Lamb. She became the prosperous wife of somebody else. She married, in fact, Mr. Bartrum, the silversmith and pawnbroker of Princes Street, Leicester Square. She must have been living for many a year quite near to

Charles Lamb: he must have sometimes heard of her; he often thought and wrote of her, veiling her identity under a fictitious name. He must have passed the door of Mr. Bartrum's shop many a time when he paid his visits to his beloved old bookshops in Wardour Street and Princes Street itself; but there is no evidence that Charles Lamb ever saw his fair-haired maid—the Anna of his dreams—again.

"Closed are her doors on me: I must not see her." [1]

"*Rosamund* sells well in London," wrote Lamb to Southey a month or two after its appearance. The volume of blank verse had been a failure; but the "miniature romance" had brought Lamb a few pounds; and, as a first sign of success, he paid a visit to his tailor:

"My tailor has brought me home a new coat, lapelled, with a velvet collar. He assures me everybody wears velvet collars now. Some are born fashionable, some achieve fashion, and others, like your humble servant, have fashion thrust upon them. . . ."

Towards the end of 1798 Coleridge and the Wordsworths were in Germany, and Southey had taken Coleridge's place as Lamb's literary correspondent. Lamb was to be a contributor to Southey's *Annual Anthology*.

"I hear that the Two Noble Englishmen have parted no sooner than they set foot on German earth," Lamb wrote to Southey. He was still hurt and angry with Coleridge; for Coleridge, before departing, had left a singularly untactful message for him with Lloyd:

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[1] Mrs. Tween, the daughter of Randal Norris, was Canon Ainger's authority that Ann Simmons of Widford was Lamb's fair-haired maid. The second Mrs. Norris belonged to Widford; and the story seems to have been quite well known. A daughter of the fair-haired maid, Miss Maria Bartrum, married (in 1840, after Lamb's death) William Coulson, the great London surgeon. She is described as "notable for her skill in painting, as well as her attractive manners and great intelligence."

"Tell Charles Lamb if he requires any knowledge, he may apply to me."

And Lamb had straightway drawn up and sent to Coleridge his *Theses Quaedam Theologicae*. He desired to know "whether the higher order of Seraphim illuminati ever *sneer*," and "whether God loves a lying angel better than a true man," and "whether pure intelligences can *love*, or whether they can love anything besides pure intellect?" and several other things—bitter and uncomfortable questions, which Coleridge had not answered; because Coleridge was hurt and angry too.

CHAPTER VIII

POVERTY AND POPULARITY

THE year 1800 found Charles and Mary domiciled together. Old John Lamb had died in the previous year, and was buried with his wife and Aunt Hetty in the churchyard of St. Andrew's, Holborn; and as soon as might be, Charles had brought his sister to live with him in Chapel Street, Pentonville. For a time all went well. Lamb walked daily from Pentonville to the India House, and in the interstices of tea and indigo wrote many letters to Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other people. Mary was "never in better health and spirits." Coleridge had come back from Germany, and was in London, translating from the German and writing for the *Morning Post*. The quarrel between the two friends was made up; and in March 1800 Coleridge was actually staying with the Lambs in Pentonville, translating *Wallenstein*, clad in a very old dressing-gown, "value five pence," in which he looked like a conjuror.

"I am living in a continuous feast," wrote Lamb: "Coleridge has been with me now for nigh three weeks;

and the more I see of him, in the quotidian undress and relaxation of his mind, the more cause I see to love him, and believe him a *very good man*, and all those foolish impressions to the contrary fly off like morning slumbers. . . ."

But in May the Lambs' old servant fell ill and died; and Mary, unfit for domestic trials, broke down, and was taken away again to the asylum. Left quite alone in the house, Charles was in despair:

"My heart is quite sunk," he wrote to Coleridge, "and I don't know where to look for relief. Mary will get better again, but her constantly being liable to such relapses is dreadful; nor is it the least of our evils that her case and all our story is so well known around us. We are in a manner *marked*. . . . I am completely shipwrecked. My head is quite bad. I almost wish Mary were dead. . . ."

It was perhaps the lowest moment of Charles Lamb's life; and then an old schoolfellow, Matthew Gutch, who knew all their story, came to the rescue.

Gutch was a law-stationer, living in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, and he offered Lamb three rooms in his house, including the services of an old housekeeper, for £34 a year. Lamb thankfully accepted the offer, realising that nowhere could they find such privacy as "in the midst of London." And so in the autumn of 1800, the brother and sister—Mary well again—were for a time, at least, comfortably settled. Lamb was very soon writing with proprietary satisfaction about a brace of birds "now dangling before our kitchen blaze." It was pleasant to be near the theatres and his various friends, old and new. "I am determined to take what snatches of pleasure we can between the acts of our distressful drama," he wrote to Coleridge. He made little jaunts. He went for a few days to Oxford—Gutch's family lived in Oxford—and visited All Souls'

and the Bodleian. He had already paid a visit to Cambridge, for Lloyd was lately married and living near Cambridge, and Lamb had stayed with Lloyd and his young wife, and made the acquaintance of Thomas Manning. Manning, then a brilliant and eccentric mathematical tutor at Cambridge, was afterwards to be known as an explorer in China and Thibet, and the greatest Chinese scholar of his time. (To-day he figures in biographical dictionaries as "traveller, and friend of Charles Lamb.") Lamb became strongly attached to Manning: "Manning of Cambridge—a man in a thousand"; and some of Lamb's most characteristic letters were written to Manning, after Manning went to China.

Another new friend of this year, introduced by Coleridge, was William Godwin, author of *Caleb Williams*, then a man of five and forty, with whom Lamb was "a good deal pleased." He was, Lamb said, "a very well-behaved, decent man, nothing brilliant about him or imposing"—a man with "neither horns nor claws"; in fact, "quite a tame creature" in spite of his "noisy fame." In 1800 Mary Wollstonecraft had been two years dead; and the widow Clairmont had not yet set her cap, from her balcony, at the "immortal Mr. Godwin."

Then there was George Dyer, Lamb's old friend; simple, absent-minded, scholarly; the old Blue-coat schoolboy, for whom Lamb had a most tender regard: "The oftener I see him, the more deeply I admire him," he wrote; and he never had reason to change his mind about George Dyer.

The modest success achieved by *Rosamund* had set Charles to work on a five-act tragedy in blank verse, *John Woodvil*, or *Pride's Cure*, as it was at first called. Neither Coleridge nor Southey particularly admired this production; and Kemble, then manager

of Drury Lane, to whom Lamb sent it at Christmas 1799, lost the manuscript. Nearly a year later, when Lamb wrote inquiring its fate, Kemble made what amends he could; asked for another copy, promised a "definite answer" within a week, and even gave Lamb a personal interview. But he declined the play as "unsuitable"; and once more Lamb was dependent on his clerk's salary, with what additional he could make by his little contributions to the *Morning Post*, the *Chronicle*, and the *Albion*. The editor of the *Morning Post* employed him to furnish "witty paragraphs" at the rate of sixpence a joke—six jokes a day! And he was glad to do it, though it meant getting up two hours before breakfast. Poverty and popularity seemed to go hand in hand. Lamb had so increased his circle of friends that Gutch's rooms in Southampton Buildings resembled at times a "Minister's levée." Perhaps that was why Lamb "received a hint" that it would be agreeable to Gutch if the brother and sister could find a domicile elsewhere; which, in the summer of 1801, they managed to do—in their old home, the Temple.

Their new quarters were at 16 Mitre Court Buildings; "most delectable rooms," from the windows of which, "when you stood on tiptoe," you could look out on the Thames and the Surrey hills. Lamb was delighted; he would have "all the privacy of a house without the encumbrances." He would be "as airy, up four pair of stairs, as in the country, and in a garden, in the midst of enchanting (more than Mahometan paradise) London. . . ."

"Oh her lamps of a night! her rich goldsmiths, print-shops, toy-shops, mercers, hardwaremen, pastry-cooks, St. Paul's Churchyard, the Strand, Exeter Change, Charing Cross with the man *upon* a black horse! These are thy gods, oh London! . . . All the streets and pavements are pure gold, I warrant you. At least, I

know an alchemy that turns her mud into that metal, —a mind that loves to be at home in crowds."

For nearly nine years Charles and Mary were to live in Mitre Court Buildings; and there, for the most part of this time, they were very poor. "Contented with little, yet wishing for more," Lamb lightly expressed it when he wrote to Wordsworth. But Mary Lamb was more confidential to her friend, Miss Stoddart: "It is not well to be *very poor*, which we certainly are at this present writing."

John Woodvil had been published in 1802, but had made no money, though it was duly "cut up" by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*. Coleridge offered to supply Lamb with prose-translations from the German poets for Lamb to turn back into metre for the *Morning Post*. Another £40 or £50, in addition to his salary, Lamb said, would be "affluence"; and for a year he did in fact make £100, and then he gave it up. Six jokes a day, before breakfast, were not so exhausting as making metrical versions of Coleridge's translations from the German: "I must cut closer, that's all." And the brother and sister did "cut closer"; for Lamb, though he often lent and gave away money, never in his life borrowed, and never ran into debt.

But even poverty takes a holiday now and then. In the summer of 1802 Charles and Mary set out for the Lake Country, on a visit to Coleridge. It was their first sight of mountains. They did not tell Coleridge they were coming; there was no time. They simply arrived, having travelled by coach as far as Penrith and then taken a post-chaise to Keswick. They found Coleridge "in a comfortable house, quite enveloped on all sides by a net of mountains: great floundering bears and monsters, they seemed, all couchant and asleep." For they arrived in the evening, when everything was bathed in the colours of a gorgeous

sunset, which presently fading, gave place to the silence and shadows of night. The Lambs had never seen anything like it before. "We thought we had got into fairyland." Wordsworth and his sister were away from home; but they visited the hospitable Clarksons, at Wordsworth's cottage; and Lamb waded up the bed of Lodore, and they both clambered up to the top of Skiddaw: "Oh, its fine black head, and the bleak air atop of it, with a prospect of mountains all about and about, making you giddy; and then Scotland afar off, and the Border countries, so famous in song and ballad! It was a day that will stand out, like a mountain, I am sure, in my life."

What would Charles Lamb have been, if Fate had not always beckoned him back to the "lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street"? In the pure, caller air of Cumberland, "wandering free among the mountains," he felt many things possible.

"My habits are changing, I think, *i.e.* from drunk to sober. Whether I shall be happier or not remains to be proved. I shall certainly be more happy in a morning; but whether I shall not sacrifice the fat, and the marrow, and the kidneys, *i.e.* the night, glorious, care-drowning night, that heals all our wrongs, pours wine into our mortifications, changes the scene from indifferent and flat, to bright and brilliant! O Manning, if I should have formed a diabolical resolution by the time you come to England, of not admitting any spirituous liquors into my house, will you be my guest on such shameworthy terms? Is life, with such limitations, worth trying? The truth is that my liquors bring a nest of friendly harpies about my house, who consume me. This is a pitiful tale . . . but it is just now nearest my heart."

What Manning answered is not known; but it is very certain that, to most of the men of Charles Lamb's

little *côterie*, life would not have seemed worth trying without a considerable amount of "liquor." It was an age of robust Georgian conviviality, an age of the bumper and the "flowing bowl," when Pitt was Prime Minister and Miss Austen could speak almost deferentially of a gentleman "in his cups." And for literary and dramatic London, it was still the age of the taverns; of sanded floors, and porter, and gin, and "punch." The Shakespearian glories of the Mermaid in Bread Street had descended on the Mitre Coffee-house of Dr. Johnson, and Boswell, and "Goldy"; and the Old Mitre in Fleet Street was still flourishing within a stone's-throw of Lamb's rooms in the Temple. Tennyson's Head Waiter at the Cock must have been quite a young man in those days.

And so, though Charles Lamb, with his love of hyperbole and his inveterate habit of making "copy" out of himself, has been his own worst accuser, there is no doubt that he used too often to come home, as poor Mary expressed it, "very smoky and drinky"; that he did find alcohol the one strong temptation of an exceptionally noble, unselfish, and unhappy life. And there is no doubt that he fought against it, bravely, if intermittently. A brain like Charles Lamb's ought surely never to have been touched by alcohol. Frail in body, nervous and excitable, he was easily affected by it. According to Procter, a very little liquor disturbed his speech, "which at best was but an eloquent stammer." Yet Procter asserts that in all the twenty years he knew Lamb intimately, he only once saw him drink "immoderately," and that much injustice has been done to Lamb by accusing him of "excess in drinking."

What, in that day and that *côterie*, was moderation, and what was excess? Perhaps, after all, the best proof that Lamb, in spite of his undeniably "too much punch and too much tobacco" was no habitual drunkard,

is that for thirty-three years—from 1792 to 1825—he performed the duties of his clerkship at the East India House with punctuality and method, and that during that time his salary was increased from £70 to nearly £700 a year.

"A small spare man, clothed in black," he "went out every morning and returned every afternoon, as regularly as the hands of the clock moved towards certain hours. You could not mistake him. He was somewhat stiff in manner, and almost clerical in dress, which indicated much wear. He had a long, melancholy face, with keen, penetrating eyes, and he walked with a short, resolute step, citywards."[1]

The Puritan and the Bohemian were blended in Charles Lamb. London, and her lamps of a night, moved his soul, though he was but an onlooker on much that his "Mahometan Paradise" offered; and there was always the other thing—a pale, daylight idyll—that pleased his Puritan moods. It was in one of these, not long after he returned from the Cumberland holiday, that he penned the little verses in memory of "Hester"—the pretty young Quakeress, Hester Savory, who used to pass his window in the old Pentonville days, and who had married and died. He was rather proud of his verses at the time, and he sent them to his friend Manning; and in his whimsical way—always making "copy" out of himself, he wrote:

"I send you some verses I have made on the death of a young Quaker you may have heard me speak of as being in love with for some years while I lived at Pentonville, though I had never spoken to her in my life. She died about a month since. If you have interest with the Abbé de Lisle, you may get 'em translated; he has done as much for the Georgics."

Canon Ainger, though he knew so well the misleading

[1] Procter's *Memoir*.

quips and pranks of Lamb's letters to Manning, takes this statement seriously; but the whole episode speaks for itself, as, indeed, do the verses, with their cold Puritan grace:

"When maidens such as Hester die,
Their place ye may not well supply,
Though ye among a thousand try,
With vain endeavour.

A month or more hath she been dead,
Yet cannot I by force be led
To think upon the wormy bed,
And her together.

A springy motion in her gait,
A rising step, did indicate
Of pride and joy no common rate,
That flush'd her spirit.

I know not by what name beside
I shall it call:—if 'twas not pride,
It was a joy to that allied,
She did inherit.

Her parents held the Quaker rule,
Which doth the human feeling cool,
But she was trained in Nature's school,
Nature had blest her.

A waking eye, a prying mind,
A heart that stirs is hard to bind,
A hawk's keen sight ye cannot blind,
Ye could not Hester.

My sprightly neighbour, gone before
To that unknown and silent shore,
Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
Some summer morning,

When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
A bliss that would not go away,
A sweet forewarning?"

CHAPTER IX

"BY CHARLES AND MARY LAMB"

THE strangest fact in this strange story is that, when Mary Lamb was not insane, and not in Hoxton Asylum, she was, by all accounts, a woman of sound common-sense and calm judgment, on whom the brother continued to depend for guidance, and sympathy, and advice. If ever Charles acted unwisely, it was because "my guardian angel was away at the time." At first, her attacks of insanity recurred only every two or three years, and lasted only for a few weeks; but, as time went on, she was oftener away from home, and for longer periods—sometimes as often as twice in a year, and for a month or two at a time. There were always premonitory symptoms; irritability, or other change of manner. Charles knew them well, and knew that when they appeared, he must act at once. And then the brother would "take her under his arm to Hoxton Asylum." It was very affecting, Procter says, to meet them, walking together, weeping together—carrying Mary's strait-jacket with them—on this painful mission. Usually, after she was well enough to return home, Mary was for a time dull and depressed—on Charles's account, as well as her own; and then Charles—always on the outlook for what might happen, became, in Mary's own words, "feverish and teasing."

"Indeed it has been sad and heavy times with us lately," she wrote to her friend Miss Stoddart, in the autumn of 1805. "When I am pretty well, his low spirits throw me back again; and when he begins to get a little cheerful, I do the same kind office for him."

And again:

"You would laugh, or you would cry, perhaps both, to see us sit together, looking at each other, with long

and rueful faces, and saying 'How do you do?' and 'How do you do?' and then we fall a-crying, and say we will be better on the morrow."

They began to realise that their very love for each other was proving the torment of their lives; but "I am most seriously intending," wrote Mary, "to bend the whole force of my mind to counteract this, and I think I see some prospect of success."

What was her little scheme? Was it a plan of co-partnership in literary enterprise, the first dream of those books "by Charles and Mary Lamb" that were to win them literary popularity? If so, it was indeed to prove a success. For not long after this, Charles and Mary were actually writing together their *Tales from Shakespeare*, which were published in 1807 for "Godwin's bookseller" at the Juvenile Library, in two volumes, "embellished with copperplates."

"You would like to see us," wrote Mary now, "as we often sit writing at one table (but not on one cushion sitting) like Hermia and Helena in the *Midsummer Night's Dream;* or rather like an old literary Darby and Joan; I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished, and then he finds out that he has made something of it."

And Charles sent a message from Mary to Manning, then just started for the East:

"She said you saw her writings about the other day, and she wishes you should know what they are. She is doing for Godwin's bookseller twenty of Shakespeare's plays, to be made into children's tales. Six are already done by her; to wit, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Cymbeline*. *The Merchant of Venice* is in forwardness. I have done *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and mean to do all the tragedies.

I think it will be popular among the little people, besides money. It is to bring in sixty guineas. Mary has done them capitally, I think you'd think. . . ."

Meanwhile, Charles had been busy on his own account with a farce—the celebrated *Mr. H—*; and in June 1806, he wrote in excellent spirits to Wordsworth. His play had been accepted by the proprietors of Drury Lane, "to be brought forward when the proper opportunity serves." A few months later, it was being rehearsed, and to come out next week. The chief part was given to Elliston. Lamb's anxiety was great. "I shall get £200 from the theatre," he writes to Manning in China, "if *Mr. H—* has a good run, and I hope £100 for the copyright. Nothing if it fails; and there never was a more ticklish thing. The whole depends on the manner in which the name is brought out, which I value myself on, as a *chef-d'œuvre*."

All the world knows what happened to *Mr. H—* when the name was brought out! On that eventful night, Charles and Mary sat together "next the orchestra in the pit." And the play *failed;* it was *hissed;* and Charles Lamb—critic, as well as author—*himself joined in the hissing.*

"Mary is a little cut," wrote Lamb to Miss Stoddart, "at the ill-success of *Mr. H—*, which came out last night, and *failed.* . . . We are determined not to be cast down. I am going to leave off tobacco, and then we must thrive. A smoking man must write smoky farces.

"Mary is pretty well, but I persuaded her to let me write. . . ."

To Wordsworth, on the same day, he wrote: "Mary's love to all of you—I wouldn't let her write. Dear Wordsworth, *Mr. H—* came out last night, and failed. I had many fears; the subject was not substantial enough. John Bull must have solider fare than a

letter. We are pretty stout about it; have had plenty of condoling friends; but, after all, we had rather it should have succeeded. . . . The number of friends we had in the house, my brother and I being in public offices, &c., was astonishing; but they yielded at length to a few hisses.

"A hundred hisses! (Damn the word, I write it like kisses—how different!) A hundred hisses outweigh a thousand claps. The former come more directly from the heart. Well, 'tis withdrawn, and there is an end. Better luck to us."

And better luck did come. Only a month later, in January 1807, Lamb had the pleasure of sending off a present to Wordsworth; to Wordsworth, who always made a point of sending Lamb each "work" of his as it came out:

. . . "We have book'd off from the Swan and Two Necks, Lad Lane, this day (per coach) the *Tales from Shakespeare*. . . ."

Charles himself was "answerable" for *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Timon*, *Romeo*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, "for occasionally a tail-piece or correction of grammar, for none of the cuts and all of the spelling. The rest is my sister's. We think *Pericles* of hers is best, and *Othello* of mine." Even the preface had been concocted between them: "My part of the preface begins in the middle of a sentence in last but one page, after a colon, thus:

": which if they be happily so done, &c. . . ."

As for the "cuts," over which Charles and Mary shook their heads, they are of some interest to-day; for they were engraved by Blake, from designs by Mulready—then a boy of twenty. And it was Mrs. Godwin, the widow Clairmont, who was responsible for their selection; she was, in fact, "Godwin's bookseller" at the Juvenile Library.

Another joint work by the brother and sister was

published in this same year: *Mrs. Leicester's School, or the History of Several Young Ladies related by Themselves.* Of these stories, only three, "The Witch-aunt," "First Going to Church," and "The Sea Voyage," were written by Charles; the others were by Mary Lamb; and of them to-day, perhaps the two that will be read with most interest are "The Young Mahometan" for its autobiographic material, and "The Father's Wedding-Day" for its inimitable sweet humour. Both of these books, the *Tales from Shakespeare*, and *Mrs. Leicester's School*, were to become at once popular. Both passed into second and third, and subsequent editions. *Mrs. Leicester's School* became a favourite book in many an English schoolroom, and the *Tales from Shakespeare* has long been a classic in our language. Thousands of British children have sucked in their Shakespeare, without knowing it, from these simple stories by Charles and Mary Lamb. "There is indeed," says Canon Ainger, "no better introduction to the study of Shakspeare than these *Tales*—no better initiation into the mind of Shakspeare, and into the subtleties of his language and rhythm."

In 1808 Charles brought out two more books; his *Adventures of Ulysses* for the Juvenile Library (intended as an introduction to the reading of *Telemachus*), and a more important work, his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the Time of Shakespeare.* And the year was an eventful one in other ways. For on May-day 1808, Mary's friend, Sarah Stoddart, married Charles's friend, William Hazlitt; and they had met and fallen in love by Mary's fireside. Many were the forebodings of friends on both sides—afterwards justified—as to the wisdom of this union. But it was no girl and boy marriage; and "there was love between them"—then, at least.

A quaint little wedding-group it must have been,

on that May-day morning, at the church of St. Andrew's, Holborn. Mary Lamb, for the occasion, blossomed out into the character of bridesmaid; and she seems to have had considerable difficulty in making up her mind whether to wear white muslin, or—which she greatly preferred—a certain silk dress of a "dead-whiteish bloom colour" that Manning had sent her all the way from China. In her new dress (let us take it for granted it was Manning's silk) Mary must have passed quite close to her mother's grave in St. Andrew's churchyard, where also her father and Aunt Hetty lay buried. And poor Charles, in whose face his friends read always the "lines of old, unforgotten calamity"—as he stood in the little group, watching the wedding ceremonial, was so overcome with the incongruity, the unreality, of all things, that he was seized with a desire *to laugh*. The same desire had once, he tells us, in the same way, assailed him at a funeral!

A year later, the Lambs were obliged to change their lodgings, and they took chambers at No. 4 Inner Temple Lane. As at every move, Lamb made the very best of his new surroundings. Two rooms on the third floor, and five rooms above, with an inner staircase, all new painted, for £30 a year! He meant, he told Manning, to live and die in No. 4 Inner Temple Lane:

"Our place of final destination—I don't mean the grave, but No. 4 Inner Temple Lane—looks out upon a gloomy churchyard-like court, called Hare Court, with three trees and a pump in it. Do you know it? I was born near it, and used to drink at that pump when I was a Rechabite of six years old."

Unfortunately, Mary's removal to Hoxton became necessary before they had settled down in their new abode.

"What sad large pieces it cuts out of life! out of *her* life, who is getting rather old; and we may not

have many years to live together. I am weaker, and bear it worse than I ever did. But I hope we shall be comfortable by and by. The rooms are delicious, and the best look backwards into Hare Court, where there is a pump always going. Just now it is dry. Hare Court trees come in at the window, so that 'tis like living in a garden. . . ."

Their third and last joint work, the *Poetry for Children*, appeared in this year: "humble little poems," Lamb called them, all on children's subjects, picked out by an old bachelor and an old maid: "Many parents," he said with pride, "would not have found so many." But they had worked themselves out of children's subjects, and were at a loss what to do next. "I am quite aground for a plan," Charles wrote; "but I must do something for money."

Not that Lamb was in immediate want of money; his salary at the India House had been raised, and the books had brought enough "for a year or two to come." But for Mary's sake Lamb looked ahead; he had "prospective wants."

"Oh, money, money, how blindly thou hast been worshipped, and how stupidly abused! Thou art health and liberty and strength; and he that has thee may rattle his pockets at the Devil."

In October 1809, Mary was recovered once more, and she and Charles stayed with the Hazlitts at their cottage at Winterslow. They returned to town in excellent health and spirits; had walked from eight to twenty miles a day, in constant sunshine. "The country," Lamb wrote to Coleridge, "has made us whole." Back in the Temple, they were putting up their bookshelves and arranging their Hogarth engravings on the walls: "Our Hogarth Room," Lamb loved to call it. The water of the Hare Court pump had been found "excellent cold with brandy" and "not very

insipid without." So high were Lamb's spirits that he was meditating a little book for children on titles of honour, and had prepared a little scale, "supposing myself to receive the following various accessions of dignity from the king, who is the fountain of honour," and there follows the well-known scale of imaginary honours, from "Mr. C. Lamb" upwards to "Pope Innocent"—"higher than which is nothing upon earth."

And indeed, though for Charles and Mary there were to be neither "king's honours" nor ecclesiastical dignity, the years from 1809 to 1817, when they left the Temple for ever, were perhaps their most brilliant and prosperous years. They had many friends; the Leigh Hunts, and Godwins, and Hazlitts; the Randal Norrises; old Captain Burney and his wife, the original of Mrs. Battle; and many more. And what a company it was that met together on Wednesday evenings in those high-up chambers in the Inner Temple! The furniture was old-fashioned; the books were "ragged veterans"; the ceiling was low. In the middle of the room stood the old mahogany card-table, opened out, with the little snuff-box set ready on it. On the side-table were the cold meats and hot roasted potatoes, the "vast jug of porter" from Fleet Street's "best tap." And one by one they came; those talkers, and smokers, and "card-boys"; the "Wednesday-men," Charles Lamb's "friendly harpies," all more or less famous men, then or afterwards; and here and there also a wife of one, a particular crony of Mary's, or a woman of distinction, such as the actress Fanny Kelly, with the "divine plain face." There were the Burneys, father and son—who does not remember Lamb's impulsive sally, "Martin, if dirt were trumps, what hands you'd hold!" and Barnes and Alsager, of the *Times* staff; Leigh Hunt, Godwin, and Hazlitt; Ayrton, director of music at the King's Theatre; Rickman, clerk of the

House of Commons (originator of the census), "hugely literate," "a finished man." There were Basil Montagu, and Crabb Robinson, and Barron Field; and on "great extra nights" there would be Wordsworth or Coleridge.

What drew these people together under this roof, high up in the Temple? A small, spare man, in black, with a head worthy of Aristotle, and a little gentle-faced old maid in a rather extinguishing mob-cap? "He invited you suddenly," says Procter; "not pressingly; but with such heartiness that you at once agreed to come;" and, when they did come, he gave them "his outstretched hand, and his grave, sweet smile of welcome." Mary was there, moving about among her guests, gently hospitable; always with her peculiar upward look at Charles, "as though to give him assurance that all was then well with her"; and Charles's affection for her, "somewhat less on the surface," was "always present." He was the lode-star of these wonderful Wednesday evenings. "He always made the best pun and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things, in half-a-dozen sentences, as he does. His jests scald like tears; and he probes a question with a play upon words."[1]

There was another, not quite so happy, visit to Winterslow in the autumn of 1810; and another visit to Oxford, and the pictures at Blenheim. It was this visit that suggested "Oxford in the Vacation"; and Charles and Mary and Hazlitt must together have watched in that old college kitchen the "Spits that have cooked for Chaucer."

Mary was again in the asylum later in that year; but Charles was writing a good deal through 1811. He wrote for Leigh Hunt in the *Reflector*, and his *Prince*

[1] Hazlitt.

Dorus, and *Beauty and the Beast* were published by "Godwin's bookseller." In 1813 he wrote the Prologue for Coleridge's *Remorse*, which ran twenty nights at Drury Lane; and in 1814 he contributed the "Confessions of a Drunkard" to Basil Montagu's *Enquiries into the Effects of Fermented Liquors*, and his article on Wordsworth's *Excursion* (so cruelly mutilated by Gifford) to the *Quarterly Review*.

It was in 1815 that Talfourd first met Charles Lamb. Talfourd, the serjeant and judge, the original of "Traddles" in *David Copperfield*, was to become Lamb's executor, and biographer, and devoted friend. In 1815 he was a lad of nineteen, full of literary enthusiasm, and a pupil of the great Chitty, whose chambers were on the next staircase to Lamb's, in Inner Temple Lane. Talfourd had read some of Lamb's verses, and searched the London bookstalls for a copy of *Rosamund Gray;* and when he found it, in a little shop in Holborn, his admiration for this "miniature romance" was such that his anxiety to see its author "rose almost to the height of pain."

And then came an invitation from Mr. Evans of the India House, who lived in Weymouth Street, "to meet Mr. Charles Lamb"; and one night about ten o'clock, as soon as Talfourd could leave Chitty's office, he walked through a deep snow to Weymouth Street, and arrived in time only to meet Lamb departing! But in kindness to the young hero-worshipper Lamb stayed for half an hour longer; and then together, through the winter night, they walked back to their "common home," the Temple. Twenty years of intimacy were to follow this meeting. "Who shall describe his countenance," wrote Talfourd, remembering this first sight of him, "catch its quivering sweetness, and fix it for ever in words?"

Mr. Evans was the proprietor of the *Pamphleteer*, and Talfourd straightway wrote an essay for it in which

Lamb appeared as one of the Chief of Living Poets. Lamb was delighted; he had never been so praised before. And not long afterwards, knowing very well what would please the boy, he arrived in Chitty's office, almost breathless, to ask "Mr. Talfourd" to meet "Mr. Wordsworth," who was in London, and actually at that very moment in Lamb's parlour, next door! Talfourd hurried out with his "kind conductor," and a moment later was presented to Wordsworth, with the preface, "Wordsworth, give me leave to introduce to you *my only admirer*."

CHAPTER X

THE "LONDON MAGAZINE"

THE Wednesday evenings in the Temple came to a sudden end in 1817. Mary's more frequent attacks of insanity, and absences from home, Lamb's restless inability to do literary work with so many "friendly harpies" about him, pointed to the wisdom of a change of abode. The "Knocketernals," as he called his nightly visitors, were dear to him; but he was "over-companied." He was never "C. L.", but always "C. L. & Co." It was a wonderful week in which he could get two evenings, or even one, to himself. He was, in fact, never alone, except on his morning walks to the India House, which were, for that reason, like "treading on sands of gold."

And so the brother and sister took down the Hogarths from their walls, and said good-bye to the Temple for ever: "It was an ugly wrench—but, like a tooth, now 'tis out, and I am easy." Their choice fell on cheerful, if somewhat noisy, lodgings, over a brazier's shop in Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, at the corner of Bow Street, where Will's Coffee House once stood.

"We are in the individual spot I like best in all this great city," wrote the optimistic Lamb. "The theatres, with all their noises; Covent Garden, dearer to me than any gardens of Alcinous, where we are morally sure of the earliest peas and 'sparagus. Bow Street, where the thieves are examined, within a few yards of us. Mary had not been here four-and-twenty hours before she saw a thief. . . ."

It was a change; a kind of holiday in London. Mary could sit all day with her sewing at the window—looking out for thieves—while Charles was at the India House; and, in the evening, after their simple meal together, they could go to the pit at Drury Lane, or take a stroll past all the theatre doors. When Mary kept well, they forgot they had ever been "assailable." They were "strong for the time as rocks. The wind is tempered to the shorn Lambs."

For six years, from 1817 to 1823, those noisy lodgings in Covent Garden remained their headquarters. In summer, they turned countrywards; usually to Dalston, which was not the Dalston of to-day, but a place where they walked in meadows and picked primroses; "and Mary corrects me when I call 'em cowslips." And they made other little jaunts, to the sea at Hastings, and once or twice to Cambridge; and once, when Charles was seized with a desire for foreign travel, even as far as Paris and Versailles. They ate frogs, met Talma, who thought Lamb "a great rogue"; and they were towed round Paris by their young American friend, Howard Payne, the man who wrote the *libretto* of *Clari, the Maid of Milan*, and has been called the "homeless author of 'Home, sweet Home.'" But on the occasion of this visit to Paris, they took the precaution of travelling with a nurse for Mary; and Mary herself carefully packed her strait-jacket, in case it should be required. And if report says true, it was required; and Charles

was obliged to leave Mary behind at Amiens, with the nurse and Crabb Robinson, and return alone to his desk at the India House.

It was not till August 1820 that Charles Lamb began to write for the *London Magazine*—those essays over the magic signature "Elia," which more than anything else have earned for him his place in English literature.

The *London* was a new magazine, started in January 1820, with a brilliant little band of contributors under the clever editorship of John Scott. Hazlitt, who introduced Lamb to the magazine, Cary, the "Dante man," Allan Cunningham, Bernard Barton, the young Thomas Carlyle, Savage Landor, Procter (Barry Cornwall), De Quincey, Keats, Tom Hood, and the afterwards notorious criminal Wainewright (the Janus Weathercock of its pages) all wrote for the *London Magazine*. The pay was good—a pound a page for print, and two pounds for poetry—but, according to Procter, Lamb received "two or three times the amount the others did" for his *Essays of Elia*. In the summer of 1821 John Scott, having involved himself in a bitter pen-and-ink quarrel with *Blackwood's Magazine*, fought a duel "in the uncertain glimmer of moonlight" at the back of Chalk Farm (which really was a farm in 1821), and met his death "from the hand of one who went out resolved not to harm him." The *London Magazine* was taken over by Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, who edited it themselves, employing Tom Hood as their versatile sub-editor, and gave their memorable monthly dinners to the staff in their offices in Waterloo Place.

Lamb himself tells how he came to use the name of Elia: "Call it *Ellia*," he says; and so *Ellia* it must be pronounced. It belonged to an Italian clerk in the old South Sea House, with whom Lamb worked when he was there as a boy, and whom he had met from time to time ever since. Lamb borrowed the name as a

sort of practical joke; and one day in 1821, not having seen the real Elia for about a year, he called on him, "to laugh over with him my usurpation of his name, and found him, alas! no more than a name; for he died of consumption eleven months ago, and I knew not of it." Lamb kept the name; it has become, indeed, his very own. For Charles Lamb and Elia, the essayist and the man, are one and indivisible.

The "South Sea House," "Oxford in the Vacation," "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago," "The Two Races of Men," all appeared in the *London Magazine* in the latter half of 1820. "Mackery End," "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," "My First Play," "My Relations," "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," were among the contributions of 1821; and every month of every year—the magazine lived for five years—brought with it one or more of the immortal essays, running the whole gamut of Elia's excellences, grave and gay, from his "Dream-Children," and "Old China," and "Blakesmoor in Hertfordshire," to his "Jews, Quakers, and Scotchmen," and his "Dissertation on Roast Pig."

And what had the elder brother, John, been doing all these years? John Lamb had become "the Ajax Telamon of the slender clerks of the old South Sea House." Robust and prosperous always, he had lived his own easy-going life; had married a wife, a widow; picked up, or pleased himself with thinking he had, several good things in the way of old masters, and watched with some amusement the career of his literary younger brother. The clerks at the office told him that Charles was growing famous! John's tastes were not literary; but he seems to have perpetrated a "Work on Humanity," and he took it to Charles in the belief that Charles could "get it into all the reviews at a moment's notice."

"I!!" says Charles, "who have been set up as a mark for them to throw at, and would willingly consign them all to Megæra's snaky locks."

John was not averse from dropping in on Charles's Wednesday evenings at the Temple; Talfourd remembers him there: "John Lamb, the jovial and burly, who dared to argue with Hazlitt on questions of art."

As for Charles, he had always revered his brother—and always seen through him. He once wrote a sonnet to John:

> "John, you were figuring in the gay career
> Of blooming manhood with a young man's joy,
> When I was yet a little peevish boy—
> Though time has made the difference disappear
> Betwixt our ages, which *then* seemed so great—
> And still by rightful custom you retain
> Much of the old authoritative strain,
> And keep the elder brother up in state."
>
> . . . . . .

And of course John figured in one of the early *Essays of Elia*, "My Relations," which appeared in the *London* in June 1821:

"It does me good, as I walk towards the street of my daily avocation, on some fine May morning, to meet him marching in a quite opposite direction, with a jolly, handsome presence and shining, sanguine face, that indicates some purchase in his eye—a Claude—or a Hobbima—for much of his enviable leisure is consumed at Christie's and Phillips's—or where not, to pick up pictures and such gauds. On these occasions he mostly stoppeth me, to read a short lecture on the advantage a person like me possesses above himself, in having his time occupied with business which he *must* do—assureth me that he often feels it hang heavy on his hands—wishes he had fewer holidays, and goes off—Westward Ho!—chanting a tune, to Pall Mall—perfectly

convinced that he has convinced me—while I proceed in my opposite direction, tuneless."

Once, at least, John Lamb did pick up a picture of value: "An undoubtable picture of Milton," wrote Charles to Wordsworth—evidently "the original of the heads in the Tonson editions." John gave a few shillings for it; he "could get no history with it but that some old lady had had it for a great many years." And when John Lamb died, which he did in November 1821, he left to Charles, who was his executor, this Milton portrait.

In 1821 Lamb was growing ominously tired of "official confinement," and "a certain deadness to everything" followed on the death of his brother. He sat, he told Wordsworth, "like Philomel all day (but not singing), with my breast against this thorn of a desk."

In the winter that followed—the winter of 1821–2—dozing in his bachelor arm-chair with Mary at his side, he dreamed of things as they might have been. "My little ones," "dream-children," stood at his knees; and he was telling them about their old great-grandmother Field; and about their Uncle John—such a handsome, spirited youth, "a king to the rest of us"—and how, when he died, "though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterwards it haunted and haunted me. . . . I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him. . . ."

And then the dream-children, little John, and Alice with the fair hair, begged for some stories about "their pretty dead mother."

"Then I told how for seven long years, in hope

sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W—n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial, meant in maidens—when suddenly turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was. . . ."

And the dream-children faded. "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages, before we have existence, and a name. . . ." [1]

Did Mr. and Mrs. Bartrum take in the *London Magazine?* And if so, what did Mr. Bartrum think of the reference to himself in this particular number? And did the blue eyes of Anna, who was the mother of up-growing Bartrums, suffuse over poor Charles Lamb's "Dream-Children"? Perhaps people had told her—as the clerks of the old South Sea House had told John—that "Charles Lamb was growing famous." The little romance of their youth was an old story now!

CHAPTER XI

A SUPERANNUATED MAN

During one of their visits to Cambridge, at the house of their friend Mrs. Paris, Charles and Mary had made the acquaintance of Emma Isola. No dream-child was this, with the blue eyes and fair hair, but a vivacious little creature with rich Southern colouring:

"And Emma brown, exuberant in talk."

[1] "Dream-Children," *Essays of Elia.*

She was an orphan; her grandfather, Agostino Isola, an Italian refugee, had taught Italian at Cambridge to—among other people—"Mr. Pitt," the poet Gray, and the poet Wordsworth; and Charles Isola, her father, had been one of the "Esquire bedells" of the university. Emma was at school near Cambridge, and when the Lambs first saw her was spending her holidays with an aunt, in Mrs. Paris's house. Charles and Mary took an extraordinary liking to the child, and on her next holidays they "begged her of her aunt." From that time forward Emma Isola spent all her holidays with the Lambs in London; and when she left school they adopted her as a daughter. "Our Emma," Charles calls her in his letters: "Emma, our nut-brown maid"; "a girl of gold." She called them "Uncle" and "Aunt," and came and went, making their lives bright with her youth and gaiety. Perhaps it was with Emma's visits in view, for the lodgings over the brazier's shop in Covent Garden were circumscribed as well as noisy, that Charles and Mary decided once again to change their abode.

"I have a cottage in Colebrook Row, Islington," wrote Lamb to Bernard Barton in September 1823: "a cottage, for it is detached; a white house, with six good rooms; the New River (rather elderly by this time) runs (if a moderate walking pace may be so termed) close to the front of the house; and behind is a spacious garden with vines (I assure you), pears, strawberries, parsnips, leeks, carrots, cabbages, to delight the heart of old Alcinous. You enter without passage into a cheerful dining-room, all studded over and rough with old books; and above is a lightsome drawing-room, three windows, full of choice prints. I feel like a great lord, never having had a house before."

There were drawbacks. Poor George Dyer—soberest of men, but absent-minded and without his spectacles,

on the very first occasion when he called on Mary Lamb, in the broad light of day, on his way to dine with Mrs. Barbauld (what could be more respectable ?) walked straight out of Mary's parlour into the New River. He was pulled out, wrapped in hot blankets, and made delirious with brandy and water; and in this plight Charles found his old friend on his own return from the India House. It was excellent "copy" for Charles; and the whole incident appeared in his next essay, "Amicus Redivivus," in the *London Magazine*.

But, on the whole, though there was a good deal of talk about the advisability of putting up palings, Lamb's "friendly harpies" took kindly to Colebrook Cottage. They called it "Petty Venice," and found their way out to it often enough, though in those days they were obliged to walk. One of them speaks of the friendly gatherings there, calling it a house of call for all denominations, where all differences were left with the walking-sticks inside the front door. Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy stayed with the Lambs there. Tom Hood, on his first visit to Lamb, found them there, sitting with Charles and Mary by the "domestic hearth." And Tom Hood, though as he says "I have never made Bozziness my business," remembers that they talked about the younger poets of their day, and that Wordsworth upheld Shelley, while Lamb preferred Keats.

In that year, 1823, one or two things happened to Charles Lamb besides the move into Colebrook Row. He saw his *Essays of Elia* published in volume form by Taylor and Hessey; he made his Will; and he quarrelled with Southey. The volume of essays did not sell very quickly. The Will was a highly satisfactory transaction; it left all his property in trust for Mary, and named three willing trustees—his friends Allsop, Talfourd, and Procter. The quarrel with Southey, on the other hand, was a heartrending affair. For Southey had attacked

Elia, "on the score of infidelity," in an article in the *Quarterly;* and the *Quarterly* had already been unfriendly towards Lamb. Gifford had mutilated Lamb's own article in it about Wordsworth's *Excursion;* and there had also been the allusion in its pages to Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard*, as a "genuine description of the state of the writer."

"Little things that are not ill-meant," wrote Lamb to Southey, "may produce much ill. *That* might have injured me alive and dead. I am in a public office, and my life is insured."

But Southey's article on the Progress of Infidelity had attacked not only Lamb, but Lamb's friends Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt; and, hurt and indignant, Lamb sent a letter to the *London Magazine:* "Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esq.," which may be read in Canon Ainger's edition of his works. Mary knew nothing about this letter till it had come out: "My guardian angel was absent at that time." She was very sorry, Southey was very sorry, and Lamb was quickly sorry and ashamed; he never could be incensed for very long.

"The kindness of your note," he wrote to Southey in November 1823, "has melted away the mist which was upon me. I have been fighting against a shadow."

Indeed Lamb could afford to set aside even the Progress of Infidelity in the *Quarterly Review.* He was at the zenith of his fortunes—the hero of the *London Magazine*, and one of the chief clerks in the East India House.

If Charles Lamb felt like a "great lord" in the little cottage in Colebrook Row, Mary, in her mob-cap, sitting opposite to him on the domestic hearth, must assuredly have felt like a great lady. There is no happier glimpse of their companionship together than in the essay "Old China," published in the *London Magazine* in March 1823. Then, brother and sister were no longer poor:

they had "money enough and to spare," and could look back affectionately on the "good old times" in Mitre Court, when they were obliged to "cut closer."

"Do you remember," says Mary (the "Bridget Elia" of this essay), "the brown suit, which you made to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so threadbare—and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher, which you dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent Garden?" And "do you remember" the evenings at the theatre, when "we squeezed out our shillings apiece to sit three or four times in a season in the one-shilling gallery . . . and when the curtain drew up, what cared we for our place in the house, or what mattered it where we were sitting, when our thoughts were with Rosalind in Arden, or with Viola at the Court of Illyria?"

Now, they did not sit in the galleries; and sometimes Mary sat at home, while Charles represented Literature at a City banquet:

"I had the honour of dining at the Mansion House on Thursday last by special card from the Lord Mayor, who never saw my face nor I his; and all from being a writer in a magazine. The dinner costly, served on massy plate; champagne, pines, &c.; 47 present, among whom the Chairman and two other directors of the India Company.

"There's for you! and got away pretty sober. Quite saved my credit! . . ."

But winter was always a great trial to Charles Lamb; and that winter of 1823–4 and all the following year he was in poor health and spirits, and complaining that he could not write; though one of his most beautiful essays, his "Blakesmoor in Hertfordshire," did appear in the *London Magazine* for September 1824. In November—a very wet November—Mary was going "puddling about shopping after a gown for the winter," and Charles was moping at his office desk "by candle-

light—most melancholy." When Procter married Basil Montagu's step-daughter, "the pretty Anne Skepper," Lamb wrote his whimsical letter of congratulation. He was married himself to a severe step-wife, "the d—d Day-hag Business": "She is even now peeping over me to see I am writing no love letters. I come, my dear. Where is the Indigo Sale Book? . . ."

Charles Lamb's freedom was nearer at hand than he supposed. He was only fifty, though he had been three and thirty years at the desk. Life had held for him bitterer experiences than most men are called upon to bear. Care had dogged his footsteps ever since he was a boy of twenty—walking almost abreast of him. There can be no conception of the wear and tear, to a temperament like Charles Lamb's, of those long years of self-imposed duty, of Mary's constantly recurring attacks of madness and periods of dull depression. Everything was subservient to Mary's mental condition: he was always on the watch. It is said that if the talk became too exciting, he would turn the subject suddenly, or quietly and quickly dismiss his guests; he has been known, in the midst of friendly converse round the fireside—seeing some subtle change come over Mary's face, unnoticed by the rest—to lift the kettle from the hob and hold it for a moment over Mary's cap—to startle her back to sanity.

He was beginning to feel "ominously tired," and to show it. His "spring of mind," says Procter, was beginning to "lose its power of rebound." It is not much to be wondered at that after office hours, in the little home so often now left desolate, his pipe and his glass were his most comfortable companions; and in his weakness of habit he stretched out his hand almost unconsciously towards "the cup that shall be death in tasting." And while the thoughts in that "amazingly fine head" were still lovely and of good report, those

almost immaterial legs—in the gaiters that "seemed longing for something more substantial to close in"—were sometimes a little unsteady. His best friends realised that it was time Charles Lamb retired; and some of them had been quietly acting in his behalf. Early in 1825, he wrote in strict confidence to Manning—now back from the East with a long white beard and eccentric, oriental ways—that his old friend Dr. Tuthill of Cavendish Square had been to see him, and was able to certify him as *non*-capacitated, if not *in*-capacitated, for business. Not without fear and trembling was Lamb prevailed on to send in his resignation to the directors of the India House, and to await the result. In those three and thirty years, he had stepped gradually up in their service till his clerkship was bringing him a salary of nearly £700 a year. But clerks of the India House held their posts for more than three and thirty years. He waited anxiously—the days seemed like months—and every day he went and came, sitting at his old desk, just as if nothing were going to happen. And then one day they sent for him. Who does not remember that passage in his essay "The Superannuated Man"?

"A week passed in this manner—the most anxious one I verily believe in my whole life—when on the evening of the 12th of April, just as I was about quitting my desk to go home (it might be about eight o'clock), I received an awful summons to attend the presence of the whole assembled firm in the formidable back-parlour. I thought now my time is surely come, I have done for myself, I am going to be told that they have no longer occasion for me. L—, I could see, smiled at the terror I was in, which was a little relief to me—when to my utter astonishment B—, the eldest partner, began a formal harangue to me on the length of my services, my very meritorious conduct during the whole of the time

(the deuce, thought I, how did he find out that? I protest I never had the confidence to think as much). He went on to descant on the expediency of retiring at a certain time of life (how my heart panted!), and asking me a few questions as to the amount of my own property, of which I have a little, ended with a proposal, to which his three partners nodded a grave assent, that I should accept from the house which I had served so well, a pension for life to the amount of two-thirds of my accustomed salary—a magnificent offer! I do not know what I answered between surprise and gratitude, but it was understood that I accepted their proposal, and I was told that I was free from that hour to leave their service. I stammered out a bow, and at just ten minutes after eight, I went home—for ever."

It was to Wordsworth that Lamb wrote, first of all, to tell the wonderful news :

" I came home FOR EVER on Tuesday in last week. . . . The incomprehensibleness of my condition overwhelmed me. It was like passing from life into eternity. . . ."

CHAPTER XII

PASSING THE LOVE OF WOMEN

THE " Eternity " was to last nine years. At first, Lamb went about as if the sun were in his eyes. The sense of relief, and freedom, and perpetual " holydays " fairly dazzled him. Four hundred and fifty a year, with nine pounds a year deducted towards Mary's pension in case she should outlive him, Mary taking the position ordinarily accorded by the Company to a *wife!* It was stupendous. Charles walked the fair earth, and he had nothing to do except to walk, no longer as " Mr. Lamb of the India House." He was " Retired Leisure."

All days were "holydays"; he revelled in idleness. "If I had a little son, I would christen him 'Nothing-to-do.' He should do nothing. Man, I verily believe, is out of his element as long as he is operative. I am altogether for the life contemplative." As for Mary, poor soul, "Mary awakes every morning with an obscure feeling that some good has happened to us."

And yet—was it good? For Charles Lamb, tired at fifty, was not of a temperament that plays with credit the rôle of Retired Leisure. There came the reaction—the inevitable discovery that all holidays were no holidays; the wistful yearning for the old desk and stool and the chit-chat of the fellow-clerks. Above all there came the cry of a restless soul: "I cannot sit and think." The routine of the desk, the obligations of service, had been the saving of Charles Lamb, without his knowing it. Or perhaps he did know it. "These are my real works," he used to say, pointing to the big ledgers in the India House.

In summer he took lodgings for Mary and himself, at Enfield—coaches ran twice a week to Enfield in those days. They took long country walks together; Mary could still walk her dozen miles in a day. Tom Hood gave Charles a big dog; but Dash (the friendly harpies used to say he ought to have been called Rover) was always running away; and poor Charles, in his character of Retired Leisure, was quite unable to run after Dash. His friends used to meet him in the inner circle of the Regent's Park, patiently waiting at a gap in the palings where Dash had last disappeared, because Dash always came back again, if you waited long enough.

The brightest thing in all these superannuated years was Emma Isola, the "girl of gold." There is a pretty glimpse of her in Lamb's little sonnet "Harmony in Unlikeness," written when Emma and her particular

school-friend were keeping him company, during one of Mary's many absences from home.

> "By Enfield lanes, and Winchmore's verdant hill,
> Two lovely damsels cheer my lonely walk:
> The fair Maria, as a vestal, still;
> And Emma brown, exuberant in talk.
> With soft and lady speech the first applies
> The mild correctives that to grace belong
> To her redundant friend, who her defies
> With jest, and mad discourse, and bursts of song.
> O differing pair, yet sweetly thus agreeing,
> What music from your happy discord rises!
> While your companion, hearing each, and seeing,
> Nor this, nor that, but both together, prizes;
> This lesson teaching, which our souls may strike,
> That harmonies may be in things unlike!"

In 1827 the cottage in Colebrook Row was given up, and the Lambs took a house in Enfield Chase, a "gambogey-looking cottage," with four poplars in front of it.

"I am settled for life, I hope, at Enfield. I have taken the prettiest, compacted house I ever saw."

A schoolboy living next door happened to see the Lambs when they came to look over this house:

"Leaning idly out of a window, I saw a group of three issuing from the gambogey-looking cottage close at hand—a slim, middle-aged man in quaint uncontemporary habiliments, a rather shapeless bundle of an old lady in a bonnet like a mob-cap, and a young girl; while before them bounded a riotous dog, holding a board with 'This House to Let' on it in his jaws. Lamb was on his way back to the house-agents, and that was his fashion of announcing that he had taken the premises."

Charles and Mary had decided that Emma Isola must be fitted to earn her own living, in case she did not marry; and so Charles gave her lessons in Latin, and Mary worked at French in order to read French with Emma. The girl was full of the joy of life; Charles

was obliged to keep her sitting, during those Latin lessons, with her back to the window, because she wanted always to be jumping up and looking out; and even with her back turned she seemed to see what was passing, through the corners of her dark eyes. But she did learn: "I have made her a tolerable Latinist," Lamb told Procter in 1829. And she taught Charles and Mary her own Italian language; and together, this quaint trio, they "scrambled through the *Inferno*." In the company of strangers she was a silent girl; she was very silent when Savage Landor called on Lamb. Many of Lamb's friends knew her only as "a silent brown girl" who rambled about his house during the holidays. But she shared the theatre-visits and all the other little gaieties that Charles and Mary could afford. "May we venture to bring Emma with us?" Lamb wrote, when Mary and he were invited to dine with Coleridge and the Gillmans at Highgate; and it was on the return journey by coach that Lamb replied to the conductor's "All full inside?" with his "I cannot answer for the other ladies and gentlemen, but that last piece of Mrs. Gillman's pudding did for me!" "Emma's Album," too, became one of their household gods; all Lamb's best literary visitors were expected to write something in "Emma's Album." And Emma, as befitted the adopted daughter of a literary household, had tried her own hand at verses.

"What to call 'em, I don't know," wrote Lamb to Tom Hood. "Blank verse they are not, because of the rhymes; rhyme they are not, because of the blank verse; heroics they are not, because they are lyric; lyrics they are not, because of the heroic measure. They must be call'd *Emmaics*."

And then, of course, the inevitable happened: "Moxon has fallen in love with Emma, our nut-brown maid."

Edward Moxon, the young publisher, clever, am-

bitious, and poor—"that pleasant rogue Moxon," as Lamb calls him, was six and twenty when Emma Isola was eighteen. Moxon had worked his way steadily upward from the day in 1817 when he had come to London to find employment in a bookseller's shop. He had been with Longman, and Lamb had recommended him to Colburn, and then he had become Hurst's literary adviser; and in the meantime he had fallen in love with Emma. Emma, with her little capital of languages and music, had found a situation as governess in a Suffolk rectory, where she was treated like a daughter of the house by the good parson and his whole family. It was here that Emma was very ill, and the rector's wife nursed her so carefully; and Charles and Mary at Enfield were shaken by anxiety until their nut-brown maid was pronounced out of danger. Lamb himself, very shaky still, went by coach to fetch her home again. On the return journey Lamb made Emma laugh by his answer to the "well-informed man" who had plied him with so many troublesome questions. "What sort of a crop of turnips do you think we shall have this year?" their fellow-traveller had asked politely. "It depends," Lamb replied with the utmost gravity, "I believe, on boiled legs of mutton."

When the gambogey house became too much for Mary to look after, they went into lodgings again, next door—"forty-two inches nearer to London." And for a time Charles took rooms in town, and worked at the British Museum, making extracts for Hone's *Every-Day Book*. He liked the regular work. It was almost as good as being at the India House again. And he wrote his "Popular Fallacies" for the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *London Magazine* being now defunct, and amused himself with album-verses. It was the age of Albums and Annuals, *Gems*, and *Forget-me-nots*, and

what not. The editor of the *Gem* refused his "Gipsy's Malison," as calculated to "shock all mothers"; but it was accepted by *Maga;* and surely Lamb never wrote anything more passionately human than these lines:

"Suck, baby, suck, mother's love grows by giving,
Drain the sweet founts that only thrive by wasting;
Black manhood comes, when riotous guilty living
Hands thee the cup that shall be death in tasting.

Kiss, baby, kiss; mother s lips shine by kisses,
Choke the warm breath that else would fall in blessings;
Black manhood comes, when turbulent guilty blisses
Tend thee the kiss that poisons 'mid caressings.

Hang, baby, hang, mother's love loves such forces,
Strain the fond neck that bends still to thy clinging,
Black manhood comes, when violent lawless courses
Leaves thee a spectacle in rude air swinging.'

When, in 1830, Moxon, with a sum of £500 lent him by his Mæcenas, the poet Samuel Rogers, started in business for himself in New Bond Street, the first book he published was a collection of Lamb's *Album Verses*, with Lamb's own dedication to the young publisher; and *Satan in Search of a Wife* followed it in 1831. Two years later, Moxon published the *Last Essays of Elia;* and these were issued from Moxon's new shop, the "Murray-like shop," as Lamb proudly called it, in Dover Street. There was nothing now to hinder the young people's marrying. Emma had been introduced to Samuel Rogers—who had "smiled approval"; and Charles Lamb wrote to Wordsworth, "I am about to lose my old and only walk-companion, whose mirthful spirits were the youth of our house. . . . With my perfect approval and more than concurrence she is to be wedded to Moxon, at the end of August. . . . So 'perish the roses and the flowers'—how is it?"

And in the same letter he asks Wordsworth to forgive him if he changes his mind and gives the Milton portrait to Emma, as "part-portion," instead of leaving it to Wordsworth as he had always intended to do.[1] It was to hang in Moxon's "Murray-like shop." Lamb could think of little else now but Emma, and the wedding. It was a happy coincidence that Emma's "silk dress" came home at the identical time that Talfourd, too, "took silk."

Even the Enfield lodgings were given up now. The furniture, all except the old bookcase that held the "ragged veterans," was sold. Mary was in a pitiable condition, worse than she had ever been before. Charles realised sadly that Mary was no longer fit to live with him, "So I am come to live with her," he wrote. Brother and sister were in a little cottage in Edmonton, belonging to a Mr. and Mrs. Walden, "who take in patients, and have arranged to lodge and board us only."

To this little house, after the wedding in London was over, and that pleasant rogue Moxon had carried Emma off with him to Paris, poor Charles returned alone. Mrs. Walden had done a clever thing in his absence. Taking a glass of wine in her hand, she had looked at Mary Lamb. "Let us drink to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Moxon," she said, and behold! the words acted like an electric shock. In that moment, Mary was restored to her senses. . . .

"Never was such a calm, or such a recovery," wrote Lamb to the bridal pair in Paris. That evening "we" played seven games of picquet together. "We attack Tasso soon."

The months that followed were rather dull without Emma; but Lamb kept a brave front. "Tell Emma I every day love her more and miss her less." He bore his privations "pretty well." He saw the Moxons

[1] Now in the National Portrait Gallery.

" pretty often." " It is no new thing for me to be left with my sister. When she is not violent, her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and sanity of this world."

Some of the old friends came about him; Talfourd, Crabb Robinson, Cary, and old George Dyer. And he was still able to walk. Always now, along the road " dear Londonwards." " Fields, flowers, birds, and green lanes, I have no heart for. The bare road is cheerful, and almost as good as a street. I saunter into the Red Lion. . . ." Indeed, he had long been used to think of the roadside inns as milestones—he would say he had " walked a pint."

And then in July 1834, Coleridge died, the fifty-years' friend, and the shock was more than Charles Lamb could bear. " His great and dear spirit haunts me," he wrote; and in the midst of talk with friends, he would stop: " Coleridge is dead! " he would say: " Coleridge is dead! "

One day in December, walking by himself on the London road, he stumbled over a stone, and fell. His face was slightly cut, and in a few days, erysipelas set in. He sank so rapidly that when Talfourd and Crabb Robinson arrived, he did not recognise them. And, when he was dying, Mary could not even be told; she did not comprehend.

They buried him in Edmonton Churchyard, in a spot which he had himself pointed out to Mary, in one of their last little walks together. And she? He had left all his savings, £2000, in trust for Mary; to go afterwards to Emma Isola, Moxon's wife. With this, and the India House pension, Mary was comfortably provided for. Afterwards, before she left Edmonton, she used to make her little evening walk to Charles's grave. In charge of a nurse, carefully looked after by the Moxons, with Charles's old book-case full of his beloved " ragged

veterans" in her parlour, Mary lived on in a house in Alpha Road, St. John's Wood, till 1847.

Brother and sister were buried in the same grave. The Mighty Debt was paid.

CHAPTER XIII

"ELIA"

CHARLES LAMB is not one of the Titans of our literature, though he has been called the most universally beloved of English writers. He takes his place in literature as an essayist—the writer of a single volume of incomparable essays, collected from the numbers of a brilliant and short-lived London magazine. From his early childhood, the works of the great English poets and prose-writers had been his teachers, his companions, his playmates. Verbal expression of his own thoughts and feelings had been to a considerable extent limited by an "eloquent stammer"; and the same fate that had surrounded him with good old English books had also very early put the pen into his own hand. He practised various literary forms before he found his own. But his poetry, the young sonnets and blank verse, the prologues and epilogues written for other men's plays, the verses written for other people's children, the later album-verses, and poems of occasion, do not, with all their charm of feeling and ingenuity of rhyme and metrical handling, often rise above the level of pleasant, tuneful mediocrity. There is genius in the aching intensity of the "Old Familiar Faces"; there is the swing and throb of human passion in the "Gipsy's Malison"; and there is a certain exquisiteness in those formal little elegiac verses, "Hester." But, with a few exceptions, it is not in his poetry that we recognise

the poet in Charles Lamb. He early tried his hand at the dramatic form; but *John Woodvil*, his old English tragedy, and *Mr. H—*, his more modern farce, are both, as drama, to be counted failures. The one was refused, and the other hissed; and, if they are read to-day in his collected works, it is only because they were written by the man who afterwards wrote the *Essays of Elia*. His *Rosamund Gray*, the boyish miniature-romance, full of unfinished and disconnected beauties of thought and feeling, is, apart from his own life-story, to be read now only as an early exercise of his prose style. The charming " children's work," undertaken partly for much-needed money, partly for as necessary literary companionship, gave him some present popularity, and enriched our literature with the prose *Tales from Shakespeare;* but even these would not in themselves have ranked him with original writers of distinction. His first appearance in the field of critical literature was in his volume of *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets*, published in 1808, when he was thirty-three; but his further and stronger work in this same field is to be found in those separate papers, contributed from time to time, after that date, to the various periodicals of his day. It was in the *Reflector*, edited by his friend Leigh Hunt, to which Lamb contributed so much through the year 1811, that he wrote on the tragedies of Shakespeare and on the genius and character of Hogarth. And, as years went on, it was always in such contributed papers of the essay-type, more or less fugitive, more or less characteristically valuable, that he expressed himself. They appeared in the *Champion*, the *Examiner*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, Hone's *Every-Day Book*, the *Englishman's Magazine*, and, in his last years, the *Athenæum*. Some literary position Lamb had gained when Ollier published his collected works in 1818; but it was not

till 1820, when he was forty-five, and was "teased" into contributing to the newly-started *London Magazine*, that he found opportunity and scope to practise his own literary form, and to earn for himself, during the five years of that magazine's lifetime, his own peculiar niche in our literature.

The *Essays of Elia* contain most of the best of all. His best poetry will be found in their prose; his most searching and subtle criticism; "situations" so pathetic and so ludicrous that they bring tears and laughter without the help of any stage or curtain; "miniature romances" wrapped in the incidents of humdrum daily life. The quips and puns of Elia, his bright nuggets of epigram, his sugary English humour, and, above all, his ineffable tenderness and charity, make his essays unlike any others; not comparable; not to be held up and measured by ordinary literary rules, by other men's genius, or scholarship, or ability. Their charm and fragrance, their intrinsic value in our written language, are to be summed up in their own simple title: they are the *Essays of Elia*.

What is it—what blend of literary qualities—that made Elia so beloved among English writers? What is it that made Southey say of him, "His memory will retain its fragrance as long as the best spice that ever was expended on one of the Pharaohs"? Is it that the qualities beloved in Elia are not only literary; that those who read him may always see, through limpid depths, the human nature below the written words?

It was a nature that had its limitations. The boy had said good-bye to scholarship when he put off the long blue coat and yellow stockings. The Oxford of his intellect was Oxford in the vacation, where he could finger a folio in the Bodleian, or stand entranced before "spits that have cooked for Chaucer." "The *Adventures of Ulysses*" were "done" ("I would not mislead you!")

from Chapman's translation. Manning himself had never been able to carry him further than the first proposition in Euclid. He cared nothing for politics or parties, and never remembered what ministry was in power. The death of the Princess Charlotte and the infant Hope of England was chronicled by him as a holiday for the clerks of the East India House. The very thought of China, even when Manning went there, " strains the imagination and makes it ache." Australia, even when Barron Field went there, was " Thiefland." In a spirit of " antagonising "—always trying to bring things neglected into line with things respected—he sometimes ended by underrating the overrated. " Cassock prejudices " summed up for him a great deal that was scarcely tolerable by a nature so catholic in its nonconformities. For the Unitarian in Charles Lamb had long since become the " One Goddite " ; though he had never ceased to look for " silent Scripture " in all wisdom, and spoke of Christ as having " put on the semblance of Man." And the boy who, in his hour of tribulation, had found comfort in the Unitarian chapel at Hackney, was now nearer to Deity when he found himself standing alone inside an empty parish church.

The very literary form that Charles Lamb had chosen, the few vivid pages—effort of the moment—thrown off for circulation in a busy world, is characteristic of the man's life and nature. For he was " at home in crowds," and the thoughts that passed through his brain threaded their way as did the human beings on the crowded pavements of his London. By circumstance and nature he was unable to detach himself from the stress and hurry of life's realities, to engage in any one sustained literary effort. He thought and wrote very much as he walked : " He looked no one in the face for more than a moment, yet contrived to see everything as he went on." And

he trusted those who read to understand him. He took mankind into his confidence, not afraid to bare his mind and heart. His fervours and simplicities, his little foibles and prejudices, would not be laughed at; his limitations, his very frailties, would not be harshly judged, by the people on the busy pavement—by mankind. He wrote his essays for them, in the same spirit of trust and candour in which he wrote his familiar letters—now, with his essays, most precious among his works—to Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and Manning. These men, and the people on the pavement, were they not all his friends? And, as he was not afraid of their judgment, so also Charles Lamb would never have imagined it possible that his highest thoughts and deepest feelings, those moods in which he indeed approaches very near to his great master, Shakespeare, could be "caviare to the general." For it was "the general" that Charles Lamb had always exalted, in his heart of hearts. And "the general" has responded.

After all, is there not in our best hero-worship an element of human tenderness, as well as admiration, and reverence, and awe? Perhaps this is why Wellington, our hero of war, remains the "Iron Duke," while Nelson, not wholly invulnerable, is a nation's hero and a nation's darling. Would Prince Charlie have been quite such a hero of romance, if he had not lost Culloden and wandered with a price upon his head? And, among the heroes of literature, the memory of "Sir Walter" is cherished not only as the author of the Waverley Novels, but as the man who raised a castle in the air, and saw it crumble, and with his right hand "paid for all." And is not Scotland's greatest poet, Robert Burns, the most splendid and pathetic figure among her "poor sons of a day"?

And so with the memory of Elia. It is the young city clerk, with the nervous stutter, the Titian head,

the almost immaterial legs, and the unforgettable smile, whose memory we cherish; the Elia who took upon himself, in a moment of agony, a life's duty, and performed it; making his whole life subservient to it; sacrificing much, loving greatly, failing sometimes, weeping often, light-hearted and whimsical to the end. This is the man who has been called the most universally beloved of English writers. This is the Elia whom Thackeray has called " Saint Charles."

CHRONOLOGY

1775. Charles Lamb, born Feb. 10, Crown Office Row. Temple.

1782–9. At Christ's Hospital.

1789–92. In service of South Sea House.

1792–1825. Clerk in East India House.

1795–7. At No. 7 Little Queen Street, Holborn.

1796. Contributed Sonnets to Coleridge's volume of *Poems.* (Cottle.)

1797–1801. At No. 45 Chapel Street, Pentonville. 2nd ed. of Coleridge's Poems, 1797.

1798. *Rosamund Gray* published. (Lee & Hurst.)

1801–9. At No. 16 Mitre Court Buildings, Temple.

1802. *John Woodvil* published. Contributions to *Morning Post,* &c.

1806. *Mr. H—* produced at Drury Lane.

1807. *Tales from Shakespeare* and *Mrs. Leicester's School* published.

1808. *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* and *Adventures of Ulysses* published.

1809–17. At No. 4 Inner Temple Lane. *Poetry for Children* published.

1811. *Prince Dorus* and *Beauty and the Beast* published. Contributions to *The Reflector.*

1817–23. At No. 20 Russell Street, Covent Garden.

1818. *Collected Works* published. (2 vols., Ollier.)

1820–5. *Essays of Elia* contributed to the *London Magazine.*

1823–6. At Colebrook Cottage, Colebrook Row, Islington. (Afterwards called "Elia.") Collected *Essays of Elia* published by Taylor and Hessey.

1825. Retired from East India House.

1826–32. At Enfield (in lodgings, house, and lodgings again: The "gambogey-coloured house" was "the *Manse*," Enfield Chase, afterwards called "The Poplars." Contributed to Hone's *Every-Day Book*, &c.

1830. *Album Verses* published. (Moxon.)

1831. *Satan in Search of a Wife* published. (Moxon.)

1832. At Bay Cottage, Edmonton. (Afterwards "Lamb Cottage.")

1833. *Last Essays of Elia* published. (Moxon.)

1834. Charles Lamb died, Dec. 27. Buried in Edmonton Churchyard.

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Memoir of Charles Lamb, by B. W. Procter (Barry Cornwall), with portraits. 1866.

Mary and Charles Lamb, by W. C. Hazlitt. 1874.

Charles Lamb (Men of Letters series), by Canon Ainger. 1888.

Letters of Charles Lamb, 2 vols., edited by Ainger. 1888 (Macmillan).

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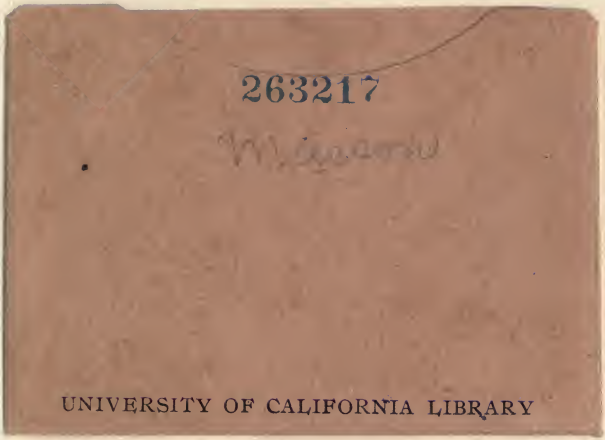
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